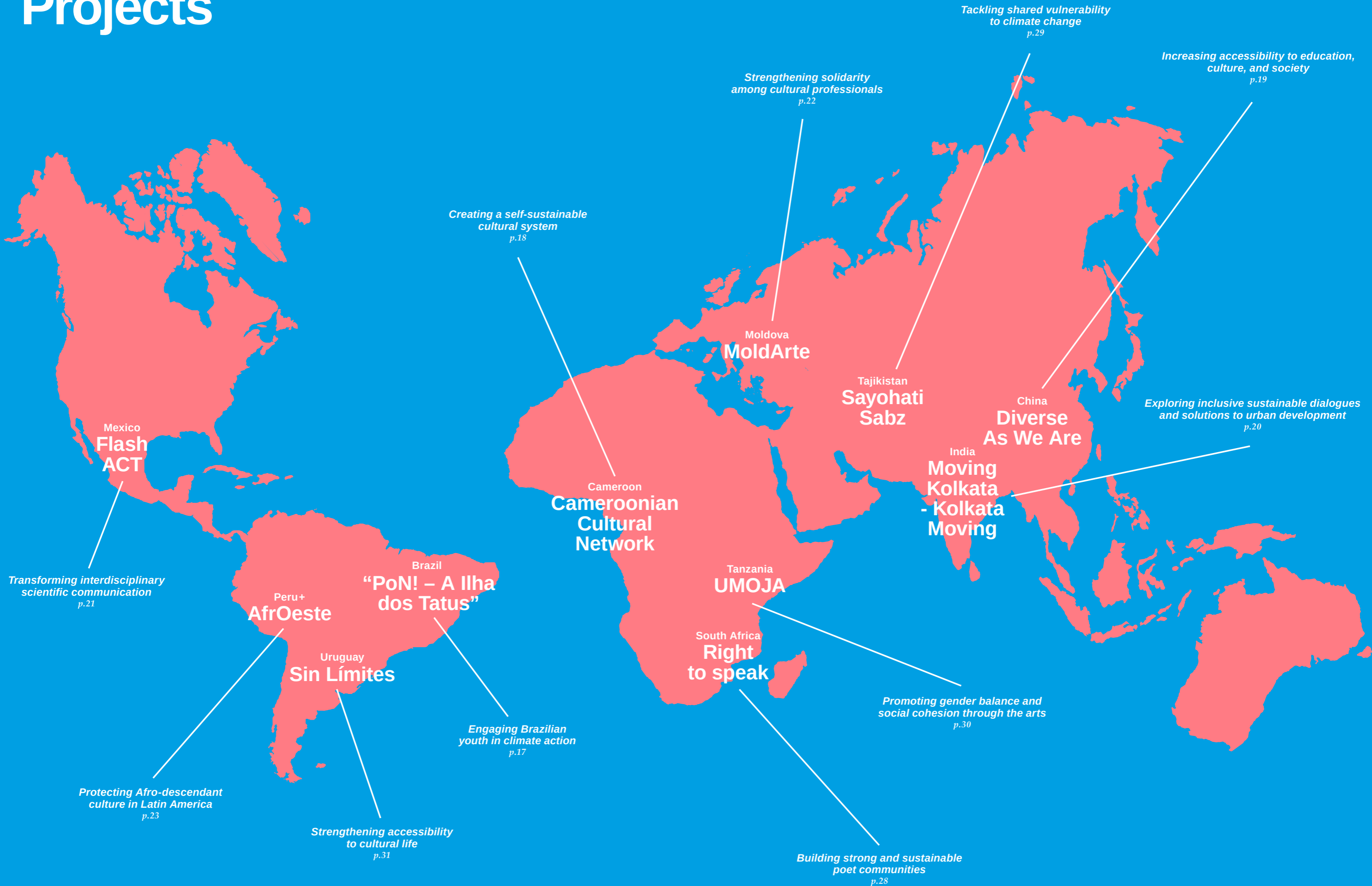


Taking EU cultural relations to the next level

**First
impressions
of European
Spaces of Culture's
11 pilot projects
in 2022**

I	Introduction	7
II	The model European Spaces of Culture	9
III	Projects	5
	Brazil PoN! – A Ilha dos Tatus	17
	Cameroon Cameroonian Cultural Network	18
	China Diverse As We Are	19
	India Moving Kolkata - Kolkata Moving	20
	Mexico Flash ACT	21
	Moldova MoldArte	22
	Peru+ AfrOeste	23
	South Africa Right To Speak	28
	Tajikistan Sayohati Sabz	29
	Tanzania UMOJA	30
	Uruguay Sin Límites	31
IIII	Lessons learnt so far	32

Projects



Introduction

European Spaces of Culture is one of the most strategic actions at European level that is turning the Joint Communication "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations", and the values and principles of cultural relations, into concrete practice. Now, in the final stages of its Preparatory Action phase, it is time to establish it as a sustainable dedicated instrument for culture in the EU's external relations.

Pioneering in international cultural relations

Since the start of the Preparatory Action in 2019, the EU institutions continuously expressed their support and the need for the project on several occasions whilst engaging with the EU Member States. They recognised the pioneering role the project plays for the future of cultural relations, as **this new collaborative approach stands out in today's international relations and plays to the strengths and assets of the EU**. European Spaces of Culture is now considered a quality label for projects that implement the model of collaboration and are based on the principles of a fair partnership.

The Preparatory Action, running from 2019-2023 over three phases, works through exploring the EU's practice and commitment to international cultural relations through a diverse set of pilot projects. Thus far we have concluded that European Spaces of Culture works not merely as a funding instrument for cultural initiatives, but as a model of collaboration that brings to life the principles and values of contemporary cultural relations. It should be perceived as **an instrument in the EU's external relations to address through culture topics that are equally relevant for European and local partners** such as climate change, democratic values, human rights, inclusion, decolonization, digitalisation, etc.

After a first round of projects in 2020-2021, the Preparatory Action saw a second round of pilot projects implemented from January-October 2022, following the Call for Ideas, published in January 2021. This initial call resulted in 39 eligible applications submitted, involving 28 EUNIC members, 44 EU Delegations and 172 local partners in total. The ultimately selected **11 projects spanned over 20 countries and involved 83 local partners, 17 EU Delegations and 20 EUNIC members**. It is these partnerships that shape the future of international cultural relations.

This publication highlights the main objectives, activities, and achievements of the eleven pilot projects implemented in 2022. As many of the projects only recently came to a close, this overview does not yet offer the full and detailed picture. These short accounts however do offer insights into how the projects addressed global transversal topics through culture and creativity. Our thanks go out to all project partners for making this possible and showing the way forward.

Enjoy the read!



The model European Spaces of Culture

The Preparatory Action is a courageous and unique initiative helping to shape the EU's work in external cultural relations, enabling a role for Europe in the world, which is humble, curious, and open to collaboration. Several key successes of the pilot projects demonstrate European Spaces of Culture opening a suitable model to implement the EU's strategic approach to international cultural relations:

- Project partners state an **additional value** in such a collaboration amongst Europeans and with local partners. The additional value is primarily seen in these areas:
 - The opportunity to address transversal topics of high EU strategic importance that go beyond promotion of national cultures.
 - The pooling of resources and funding opportunities;
 - The greater weight and visibility of a larger collaboration;
 - The wider local and global networks and connections created;
- The implementation of European Spaces of Culture directly reinforces **universal values** worldwide, such as sustainability, democracy, inclusion, pluralism, equality, tolerance, etc.
- At the core of the model is a framework that prepares each project team to design their projects according to the **local context and needs**. This can be seen in the different topics addressed and approaches adopted: putting inclusion and accessibility to cultural life for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups on the agenda in China and Uruguay; activating local communities and youth to address climate change in Brazil, India and Tajikistan; facilitating and transforming interdisciplinary scientific communication in Mexico; tailor-made strengthening of cultural disciplines and building networks, such as in Cameroon, South Africa, Moldova, and Tanzania; or promoting Afro-descendant culture in multiple countries in Latin America.
- The strategic positioning of cultural exchange in all cases goes much beyond showcasing the diversity of European cultures (a stated goal in the 2016 Joint Communication).
- European Spaces of Culture enables and facilitates **new models of collaboration**, where the basis lies in equality of partnerships and innovative methods of organizing these project groups, without hierarchies. Projects are often led by local partners and project managers, facilitate transnational collaboration across borders, and in some cases have led to the registration of a local non-profit organisation.

- As a rule, European Spaces of Culture uniquely pairs EU Delegations, EUNIC members and local partner organisations as project partners. These partners are considered complementary to one another, and all bring **different strengths, experiences, and networks** into the collaboration. If combined and used wisely this is a true asset for any project. Local partners have a clear sense of the relevance of a topic and the right approach and can reach out to audiences through their local networks. EUNIC members bring experience, knowledge and a highly professional approach to cultural encounters and can connect creatives worldwide. The EU Delegations can spread messages further due to their visibility in the host country, their interdisciplinary nature, and their huge network worldwide.
- All pilot projects are designed with the possibility to **continue over a longer period** as they address current topics in a context-appropriate format, relevant for local partner organisations and audiences. The long-term set-up is also reflected in the different formats, for example in the registration of a local non-profit organisation or in the establishment of local management teams. These project designs and implementation formats add to both the transferability and scalability of the collaboration models, a key indicator of European Spaces of Culture.

“Local partners know better local policies, how to communicate with local audiences, etc.”

European Spaces of Culture
alumni team







Pop-up installation "For a better tomorrow". Photo: Rajat Dey — p.16

Performance "Hilo Rojo". Photo: Pancho Pastori — p.23





PoN! – A Ilha dos Tatus

Brazil

Engaging Brazilian youth in climate action

Due to Brazil's global importance to the climate as the world's most biodiverse and fifth largest country, there is an urgent need to strengthen agency and engagement in the climate cause and environmental issues among Brazilian youth. European youth are often framed as global frontrunners in climate action, but to halt global warming, transformation is needed on a massive scale.

Brazil's youth have scale and impact as the country is the world's most biodiverse but, for many valid reasons, they lack agency compared to their European peers. The project Politics of Nature (PoN) proposes to address these gaps with a constructive approach aiming to engage, inspire and connect for action.

The project connects Brazilian and European youth in the fight against climate change through a digital version of the game Politics of Nature. This mobile game "PoN! – A Ilha dos Tatus" is the result of a large collaboration including Brazilian youth climate movements, game developers, EU cultural institutes, NGOs, students, municipalities, and experts.

Embedding the game in education

The PoN mobile game, developed by Brazilian independent game studio Ilex Games, is a fun and thought-provoking collaborative game for 12- to 15-year-olds based on profound research and philosophy, but duly simplified. With the game, a specially designed pedagogical toolkit to embed the game in the Brazilian educational system and a programme of physical and hybrid socio-educational events in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia, the project supports youth in expressing their full potential for local change through new partnerships.

Before and after the launch of the game in August, the project team participated in several important external events, such as at the BIG Festival, the largest festival of the gaming industry in Latin America, and the 14th Annual Conference of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, which took place in Santos. PoN was given the stage through the developers and partners presenting the game as innovative practice to address sustainability.

PoN designed a pedagogical toolkit to incorporate play into engaging workshops for teachers and educators in schools and non-formal education. With its accessible language and structure, it provides a simple way to dive into complex topics and to initiate a hands-on discussion in a meaningful way. Already, several educational boards at city level in Brazil have indicated to incorporate the game and the toolkit in their local school curriculums.

Download the game on jogopon.com.br

**“It's not just a
game, it's a cause.”**

Louise Ribeiro, intern at Instituto Querô and PoN testing mediator

Cameroon Cultural Network

Cameroon

Creating a self-sustainable cultural system

Arts and Culture is a highly underestimated social, political, and economic sector in Cameroon. But it can play a more important role to enhance social coherence and to support a fair, democratic, and respectful dialogue between communities. The local cultural sector depends strongly on international institutions and suffers from a lack of structural and national support. But how can the Cameroonian cultural infrastructure be strengthened? How can the production of high-quality art creation be reinforced? How can the local audience be more engaged in a dialogue with contemporary arts? The creation of the Cameroonian Cultural Network answers to this need and facilitates the development of a more self-sustained cultural sector by using local knowledge and by establishing networks. In the long-term this could lead to the expansion of associated infrastructures that will function as competence hubs all over Cameroon, supporting other structures in the region beyond the pilot phase.

The project unifies for the first time European and Cameroonian stakeholders to develop a digital and physical platform in order to establish a strong network for artists, to tour art productions and to propose a capacity building programme for associated infrastructures. The network supports professionalization, structuring and connecting of the cultural sector in Cameroon, through an empowerment system based on learning-by-doing, peer-to-peer consultancy, transfer of knowledge and in particular the exchange of artists between urban and rural areas of the country.

Cameroonian cultural tours

Building this network was achieved in its pilot phase through regular cultural events, offering well-needed alternative visions and impulses for the growing civil society in Cameroon. A special focus was given to the inclusive and decentral approach of the project, especially regarding possibilities to offer an equal exchange to cultural actors all over Cameroon from rural zones to urban zones and vice versa. The specially designed digital platform (ccnetwork.cm) is continuously fed with content, including a mapping and presentation of cultural infrastructures and an event calendar, in cooperation with the wider Cameroonian cultural sector.

Early June 2022, ten cultural spaces and ten participating touring artists were selected to tour and host in different cities and regions in Cameroon. This was also the moment where the cultural spaces and the selected artists were matched and subsequently, worked together to plan touring dates. The project also included workshops on event management, risk prevention, communication strategies; a programme that continued throughout the tours. The tours of the selected artists cover dance, theatre, music, poetry, and visual arts, representing the different regions of Cameroon – including both francophone and anglophone artists.

Diverse As We Are

China

Increasing accessibility to education, culture, and society

Disability is still an uncomfortable topic in China, often seen in a medical context of patient and treatment. Options available for people with disabilities to prosper are limited. Some independent artists with disabilities start to create works to claim more social inclusion, emphasizing the person and not the disability, asking EU partners for support and visibility. Local institutions, including the Shanghai municipality felt the urge to enable more access to education, culture, and society.

By showcasing and discussing diversity and inclusion in arts, culture, sports, and beyond, Diverse as We Are – International Festival of Inclusive Culture (DAWA) brought together artists and creatives with and without disabilities from China, Europe, Asia, and the world.

DAWA provided a completely new concept in China celebrating diversity and inclusion through rarely seen artistic productions and avantgarde cultural expressions and aimed to build bridges between disability communities, local audiences, and cultural institutions. The festival connects and empowers underrepresented groups of the art scene and society, calls for more access, and inclusion in cultural life through public engagements such as performance, exhibition, film, talk, and others.

Inclusive and accessible planning and production

It was essential for DAWA to include voices and perspectives from the disability community from the very beginning throughout the whole production process. For example, the DAWA visual and merchandising design was done by two designers with disability, the key visual was double-checked by members with physical disability to ensure that everyone feels included, and the quality of audio descriptions and sound logo were approved by blind people.

The festival took place in Shanghai in September 2022, with accompanying events happening before and afterwards. Partnering with local art museums, theatres, and festivals, DAWA presented a cultural programme as of over 35 contributions and events from artists with and without disabilities hailing from Europe, China, and the rest of world. The festival featured various performances, exhibitions, sports events, workshops, movies, and public discussions.

The programme was made as inclusive and accessible as possible by conducting accessibility check of venues, access supports such as sign language interpretation, audio-description, and personal assistance. At DAWA, intercultural exchange happened in performances, exhibitions, sports events, workshops, films, and public discussions involving artists and creatives with and without disabilities from Europe, China, and other parts of the world.

“I participated in DAWA as a deaf director. I haven't encountered any barriers during DAWA like I usually do. It feels like I'm celebrating my own festival with such diversity and depth. It has really been a memorable experience for me, and I sincerely hope that DAWA can continue into long running future editions.”

Sam Zeng Xiaosan, Founder of the Shanghai International Deaf Film Festival

Moving Kolkata - Kolkata Moving India

Exploring inclusive sustainable dialogues and solutions to urban development

One of the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations is to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. This project wants to centre their work around this goal and to encourage real engagement from people living in a city hit hard by climate change. Public space is a shared resource and a limited one in the case of Kolkata, and moreover is challenged by the adverse effects of climate change.

Moving Kolkata – Kolkata Moving (MKKM) combined aspects of climate change, sustainability, heritage, and communities – in a project where artists and communities are invited to share and co-create solutions for the future of Kolkata’s sustainable development. Moving Kolkata – Kolkata Moving explored inclusive dialogues around climate change and sustainable urban development. This project started a conversation around climate change in a city that is suffering strongly from the effects of pollution and fast urban development.

Participatory pop-ups in the city

Central to the project is the online MKKM platform (moving-kolkata.com), gathering numerous sustainability insights, a forum, and testimonies of citizens dedicatedly working to make the city better and safer for its people and the environment: the Kolkata Movers. The Kolkata Movers are activists, artists, business leaders, academics, and many more.

The "This is NOW" photo exhibition opened in September 2022 and remained open to the public for one month. The exhibition showcased works of two European photographers, Magali Couffon de Trevos from France and Alvaro Garcia from Spain, around the topic of sustainability in Kolkata and called for immediate citizen action towards a more socially inclusive and environmentally responsible Kolkata, through visual awareness and eye-opening images.

For three days in October 2022 a mobile pop-up-space travelled to three different locations in the city. The space was created using local sustainable material by an artist collective. The activities conducted at each location brought together institutions of Kolkata, talented artists, artists’ collectives and community-led non-governmental organisations joining hands to curate the space, contents and interventions on the theme of the day. At each location, the pop-up-event focused on different topics which included recycling and sustainable fashion, sustainable mobility, and air pollution. The displays not only offered a number of activities planned for citizens of Kolkata to participate but also included showcasing of videos and other visual material leading to sustainable outcomes in situ and on digital platforms.

Flash ACT Mexico

Transforming interdisciplinary scientific communication

Scientific communication plays a fundamental role in our everyday lives and shapes our understanding of the world. During the pandemic, it became apparent that the way scientific output is communicated is crucial. Information literacy skills help to understand data and judge information according to its trustworthiness.

Flash ACT was held as a hybrid programme to explore new pathways between art, science, and technology to develop innovative tools for scientific communication. The programme encouraged initiatives from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean to transform our relationship with the environment in a deep and significant way. Work results were addressed to real challenges, translating them into experiences, promoting systematic thinking and encouraging active engagement through creativity and curiosity. Flash ACT sought to create a multidisciplinary network, promoting new initiatives around artistic creation and scientific communication and in that way contributed to the breaking down of barriers between art, science, and technology in an increasingly interconnected world.

From Lab to Festival

Flash ACT was organised in a series of online, physical and hybrid events, divided in three stages: Lab, Encounters, and the Festival.

The main target audience included scientists, artists and digital creators from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. 16 multidisciplinary teams were initially formed during the 48 hr Lab. Teams of 3-5 needed to include all necessary profiles and skills to produce a first prototype. From this Lab 8 finalist teams were selected. The following two Encounters were organized to facilitate long-term collaboration, in which the teams received mentorships from international and national experts to develop their projects.

The working results were presented at the Festival. With all the mentorships, masterclasses, workshops, and conferences arranged in the three events, participants learned to critically examine and use data for analysis, visualization, and storytelling to communicate scientific output in artistic and technologic ways, such as VR/AR experiences, sound immersion, transmedia, coding, community intervention, interactivity, etc. The results presented were addressed to current local challenges, translating data in a way to provide concrete experiences, promoting systematic thinking and citizen participation.

All eight projects selected under Flash ACT 2022 programme included the UN SDGs into their development. Additionally, "Land Ethic" was the 2022 Flash ACT theme, to highlight environmental sustainability.

“It was enriching to meet a lot of people with different backgrounds and curriculums; to make it a very interesting dialogue. I come from a science background, so you always appreciate seeing the world from another side.”

Christopher Cedillo, Flash ACT participant

MoldArte

Moldova

Strengthening solidarity among cultural professionals

The cultural sector in Moldova is facing many challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, such as the lack of working spaces, funds, and training programmes for cultural professionals, the inadequate infrastructure and the lack of visibility and recognition. MoldArte aimed to build solidarity among cultural professionals and develop resources to engage internationally, thus creating an awareness of being part of a larger social ecosystem, where we depend on each-other to thrive.

By bringing together independent and institutional stakeholders in the Republic of Moldova and abroad, the MoldArte project developed a new public cultural scene of the Republic of Moldova that is capable of addressing the current social and political issues, to increase the degree of participation of cultural actors to the cultural landscape, leading to a more inclusive understanding of public culture.

Building an offline and online public cultural ecosystem

Running from March to October 2022, in both online and in physical formats, the project included a series of events, public talks and workshops to develop new partnerships and joint initiatives with the aim to further develop the local public cultural ecosystem. These talks addressed a variety of topics, including the solidarity between artists and organisations, the social status of cultural professionals, or the multilevel governance of public culture.

A special place in the MoldArte project was occupied by courses and workshops on topics such as cultural management, financing/sustainability/advocacy in culture, participatory budgeting and portfolio creation in the fields of performing arts, visual arts, literature and music. Specialists from Romania, the Republic of Moldova and partner countries were present in Chişinău to support these workshops.

In September and October, research visits took place in Soroca, Bălţi and Chişinău with the aim of developing collaborations and joint initiatives. Moldovan and international experts as well as journalists participated in these visits.

In order to support local needs for inclusion and participation and starting from the lack of visibility and weak dynamics among institutional and independent actors, MoldArte has created and developed an integrated online and on-site platform, offering a viable and sustainable networking tool for professionals (artists, cultural managers, public or private organizations). The online platform can be accessed on moldarte.eu.

"A good start for a novice cultural manager like me. I look forward to the next lessons! Thank you very much!"

MoldArte course participant

AfrOeste

Peru +

Protecting Afro-descendant culture in Latin America

There are more than 130 million Afro-descendant people in Latin America. This community is one of the largest and most diverse in the continent and has experienced structural discrimination and segregation for centuries. Today, they still often face economic and social exclusion, and a lack of visibility even in the digital world.

This is why AfrOeste set out to promote the richness and diversity of cultural expressions of Afro-descendant people in Latin America, to boost the artistic production and exchange between creators, promote contemporary artistic creations, and in the long term, the development of a permanent institutional network centred around Afro-descendant people.

AfrOeste created an exchange, learning and promotion network for the contemporary creative arts of the Afro-descendant people of Latin America that builds a bridge between both sides of the Atlantic. The platform mixes practice and the re-value of contemporary cultural expressions of Afro-descendant people in Latin America with the networks of international cooperation in existence in European cultural institutions. This work alliance is based on the equality between creators and institutions, with a bottom-up approach, and a willingness to bring to the public the artistic expressions of Afro-descendants.

Afro-descendant culture across the continent(s)

The AfrOeste residency programme was designed to exchange across the Atlantic and Latin America. These residencies allowed artists from respectively Cuba and Equatorial Guinea; Colombia, Equatorial Guinea and Dominican Republic; and El Salvador and Guatemala to learn of each other's practices and co-create on the spot.

Multilateral cultural events were organised through a process of collaboration. For example, the Virtual Forum of Afro Creative Women in Peru offered meeting spaces for creative works of Afro-descendant women to be made visible and to contribute to the improvement of their social and working conditions, as spaces for dialogue and designing solutions. Participants debated and reflected on topics such as dramaturgy, research on the performing arts, cultural management, the links between art and activism, the position of Afro women in theatre and cinema, and the creation of content.

AfrOeste also hosted several other celebrations of Afro-descendant culture, projects, and other initiatives. For example, the online Afrovisibles workshop focused on strengthening the communication processes of projects, specifically in the construction of narratives and visibility strategies, with the purpose of generating communicational impact for Afro-descendant projects and initiatives in digital environments. Another example the Kamba Sapukái Festival was hosted to become a permanent international multi-artistic meeting of black women and dissidents in Paraguay – an intercultural proposal that narrates the experiences of people of African descent through artistic expressions, orality, and collective knowledge.

"Working together with AfrOeste has been a wonderful experience, in the past few months we've had the opportunity to know incredible women who work insatiably to make their stories shine. The reach of AfrOeste goes beyond an exchange and promotion network for the creative arts, it's a learning network and connection between organizations, which allows us to establish alliances and connections that create synergies for change."

Amanda Arroyo, Fábrica de Historias, Costa Rica



Charly Wassing performing at Pole Artcam de Bertoua. Photo: K. Bitakal & Grimo Art — p.18



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Visit to gallery Pinacothèque Antioh Cantemir, Bălți. Photo: Vladislav Hîncu — p.22

Hybrid meeting with the participating project teams. Photo: Flash ACT — p.21



Right To Speak

South Africa

Building strong and sustainable poet communities

Although spoken word artists in South Africa have opportunities to showcase their work locally and regionally, there are major gaps that support engagement with international audience. This lack of internationalisation has worsened due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic revealed a real need for artists and organisations to better understand digital developments and how to adequately translate their work.

The project Right to Speak intentionally and strategically addressed these needs. It leveraged the power of digital to create spaces enabling young poets across oceans to speak, learn and grow together while supporting and building capacity for local organisations for sustained impact.

The project opened up avenues for poets & organisations to find and create decent work and economic growth. Their focus on building strong relationships is aimed at sustaining connected, safe and inclusive physical and digital communities. Lastly, gender equality was a key topic and the project ensured fair representation of women and women-led organisations.

Preparing emerging poets for the international stage

The project launched the South African Poets Catalogue aimed at promoting a specially curated list of young and thriving South African Poets to international markets including Europe. The Catalogue profiles 20 prolific young page and stage poets from the length and breadth of South Africa. Highlighting emerging poets who are ready for international stages, the catalogue is aimed at small and large poetry and literature platforms around the world and provides an easy guide for programmers and promoters interested in booking and showcasing South African spoken word talent.

The Right to Speak Virtual Workshop series had close to 60 participants logging in to a 90-min Masterclass every night, for six nights in a row, sharpening their skills and deepening their understanding of the business of art. From financial literacy, branding and proposal writing to funding, arts administration and tools for multimedia production, the sessions were lively and engaging and led mainly by poets – really making it clear just how much work goes on behind the scenes for any poet to build a sustainable career.

Through the project's social media channels, several initiatives have been rolled out. Supported by the EU Delegation in South Africa, the #6WordStory campaign explored human rights issues through 6-word-long poems. Every last Thursday of the month, Right to Speak hosted an Open Mic space on Twitter, welcoming poets and human rights activists from around the world to share their poems and experiences.

“When people look back at 2022, they will look back at this collective body of work, wherever you may find yourself, so it is important for us to use opportunities like this to foster the networks, and make sure that our works reaches where it traditionally wouldn't land.”

Richard Root, poet at the Right to Speak Poetry Passport

Sayohati Sabz

Tajikistan

Tackling shared vulnerability to climate change

Tajikistan is mountainous and home to some of the most enchanting and untarnished natural landscapes on the planet. It is also one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to the impacts of climate change, where landslides and extreme weather have devastating visible consequences for the mostly rural and impoverished population in remote mountainous villages. 70% of the population are living in rural areas and depend on small-scale agriculture for sustenance.

The space for civic and political expression in Tajikistan is closing – a trend which has accelerated since the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context it is essential to support local artists by promoting their work as a tool for advocacy and activism. With the support of international actors, the work of local artists has proven to be a powerful and provocative tool in recent years in Tajikistan, provoking thought and dialogue around important social, gender and human rights questions.

Sayohati Sabz ("Green Journey") transcended geographical boundaries, taking remote communities and local and international art activists on a journey together to explore the shared vulnerability of humanity to climate change, and the need to build shared cross-border resilience.

Eco-art as a response to environmental challenges

Sayohati Sabz was an innovative art collaboration project that brought together individuals who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change with art activists passionate about advocating for sustainable change through their work. Just like the devastating effects of climate change, Sayohati Sabz went beyond cultural, social, and geographical borders, and engaged some of the communities most affected and most marginalized from the global discussion.

In the summer of 2022, the project hosted an eco-art residency for young artists and activists from all over Tajikistan. The residency took them to remote communities in regions across Tajikistan that are most affected by climate change. During the residency the artists – visual and graphic artists, videographers, and photographers – expanded their knowledge in the field of modern art, eco-art, and eco-activism by exchanging with European and Central Asian artists and experts. The artists translated the residency into art works and installations under the guidance of the Central Asian artists. The international conference and exhibition "Sayohati Sabz - Art and Ecology" in Dushanbe presented the works made during the residency and programmed talks about art activism and contemporary art from Tajikistan, Central Asia, and Europe. Panel discussions addressed environmental problems in Tajikistan and the wider region as well as artists' responses to the environmental challenges of today. The exhibition of the works featured both traditional and contemporary art forms, including those made from recycled products and material.

UMOJA

Tanzania

Promoting gender balance and social cohesion through the arts

UMOJA, meaning “unity” in Swahili, used urban and contemporary art to bring together the public and artists to experience culture in a public space in Dar es Salaam and on digital platforms. UMOJA embraced the belief that collaboration brings innovation, cultural understanding and uplifts the creative economy.

Dar es Salaam, with over 6 million inhabitants, is one of the fastest growing cities in Africa, yet there is poor cultural infrastructure and education on contemporary art, thus depriving artists from accessing their local audience and audiences from enjoying art. The artists need recognition, access to markets and international exposure. Moreover, women only represent 25% of the artists.

UMOJA strengthened the bonds between contemporary and urban artists from Tanzania, East Africa and the EU in the fields of dance, music and visual art via a gender-balanced residency. The project promoted artistic cooperation, quality education, private-public partnerships, network development, and connection to global markets. The project is coordinated by a pioneering network of Tanzanian and European cultural institutes, academia and government bodies and managed by a project management team, made of artists from the local scene.

Finding new ways of understanding

UMOJA united four East African and five European artists in a five-week long, gender-balanced, multi-disciplinary residency with workshops and fringe events to further promote local urban and contemporary art. The musicians, dancers and visual artists were brought together, with local artists and partners, to collaborate and find new ways of understanding to create and innovate as one.

The residency programme intended to open a cultural dialogue between East African and European artists, as well as to promote gender balance and social cohesion through dance, music and visual arts. The original works produced during the residency were showcased at the University of Dar es Salaam, bringing together the artists and local communities.

In October and November 2022, the multidisciplinary group engaged in dialogue with one another, discussing the various meanings of community and diversity. They independently explored the capital, from the local markets to local beaches to the outskirts of Dar es Salaam. They also created original works conceptually rooted in their experiences there – from an audio exploration with local plants to large sculptures exploring life journeys to collaborative, metaphoric dance pieces.

“UMOJA dares to connect not only artists from different backgrounds. It also creates unity amongst different institutes and embassies. This joint work is a big step forward for the performative arts industry in Tanzania. Umoja ni Nguvu utengano ni udhaifu - United we stand, divided we fall.”

Tadhi Alawi, contemporary dancer and choreographer, NANTEA Dance Company

Sin Límites

Uruguay

Strengthening accessibility to cultural life

Though inclusion as a general issue is well established in Uruguay's public agenda and all institutions would support it, accessibility is far away from being implemented and visible, especially in the field of arts and culture. Individual groups and organizations are trying to change this, but don't have the resources or access to get things done, especially in times of pandemic. Covid-19 not only made it difficult to advocate for more inclusion, it also totally paralysed cultural life and pushed many artists into precarious situations.

The Sin Límites (“Unlimited”) Festival 2022 was the first performing arts festival ever in Uruguay dedicated to arts, inclusivity, and accessibility. The festival aimed to address key challenges that people with disabilities experience in accessing cultural life. The festival created a space to bring artists together so that they can combine forces and build up a strong network to support each other. This was in order to establish new standards and opportunities for artists and cultural managers, as well as making a meaningful contribution to civil society.

A key element of the festival was that it involved people with disabilities in every stage of realizing the festival, making it clear that inclusion can only happen when it is practiced from the beginning onward. Instead of focusing on differences between people with or without disabilities, the performances, workshops, artist residencies and the work behind them reflected a spirit of working together with each person bringing in their own skills. This process brought not only a change of practices but also a change of mind.

Towards inclusive performing arts

The national theatre SODRE established its in-house commission for accessibility and inclusion, steering the entire process and strengthening ties with the local groups of people with disabilities. As a direct result of the festival's announcement in December 2021, the Uruguayan government already established accessibility and inclusivity in culture as an official item in their agenda.

From 18-24 April 2022 the festival took place in Montevideo at Uruguay's National Theatre SODRE, with nine shows of dance, music, and theatre performances, in which 131 national and international artists participated – 31.9% of whom were disabled. Apart from the artistic programme, Sin Límites offered four different workshops and five panel discussions to reflect accessibility in performing arts, to generate a network within the sector. Furthermore, a creative residency was organized, with the results premiered during the festival.

All performances of the festival were realized with inclusivity and accessibility in mind, not only by the diversity of dancers, performers, and choreographers but also by offering Spanish Sign Language interpretation, audio descriptions for the audience, and making information about the programme available in Braille on the festival's programme booklet. As the main venue, SODRE was specially converted to be completely barrier-free.

“The festival was a beautiful opportunity to have these shows in our theatres, but the goal is that it ceases to exist, that we don't need a festival to have a diverse and inclusive programme. It is a first step.”

Martín Inthamoussu, President of SODRE

Lessons learnt so far

“We Europeans don’t think European, but German, French, etc. We have to come to a European thinking. Only then will we also be perceived as European partners.”

European Spaces of Culture alumni team

A new model of collaboration – as introduced, explored, and evaluated by European Spaces of Culture – responds to fast-changing conditions in international relations. The EU’s global partners are increasingly raising their expectations towards the EU to adopt a model of exchange and cooperation based on equality, inclusivity, and reciprocity. As EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell remarked at the EU Ambassadors Conference in October 2022: **“We have to be much more on listening mode to the other side – the other side is the rest of the world. We think that we know better what is in other people’s interests.”**

The conditions for this new model of collaboration therefore need to be re-examined. There are certain issues which should be considered to realise the full potential of cultural relations and European Spaces of Culture as a priority instrument in external relations:

- A European course of action in international cultural relations is a joint task, not a national effort as democracy and the transmission of values are increasingly in focus. This means that the European partners need to adapt their internal rules to allow their staff members to build such European collaborations.
- Cultural relations projects should be designed in a flexible way to be able to constantly adapt according to changing assumptions, occurring obstacles, growing networks, and achieved milestones. This became ever so evident during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Cultural relations rely on the ability of different partners sharing their expertise and networks to create new connections, relations, ideas, and solutions. The people-to-people approach is therefore at the core of each cultural relations project.
- Collaborations in cultural relations projects engage values such as democracy, inclusion, and equality and expect the commitment and the active involvement of all partners. This commitment to the cultural relations approach needs to be actively conveyed to include and empower all stakeholders, amongst them local project partners.
- Successful cultural relations projects, based on mutually beneficial collaborations, will continue to attract partners and audiences, and build a growing network. The desirable outcomes of European Spaces of Culture projects therefore lie less in short-term results and more in the longer-term engagement with these growing networks.
- Enhanced coordination and commitment between the different Directorates-General of the European Commission involved in Europe’s international cultural relations is needed to fully harness the potential to engage with the new model of collaboration – beside Education and Culture and the European External Action Service, also Neighbourhood and International Partnerships. To ensure longevity of projects and political will and support by all stakeholders involved, coordinated action is needed. The network of appointed Cultural Focal Points at EU Delegations is a first step in a structure for continuous support, but their roles and mandate need to be developed and strengthened to be effective. European Spaces of Culture can help them play a meaningful role in cultural relations activities.

In more practical terms, certain challenges within the European Spaces of Culture pilot projects related to project implementation and management were identified that could be improved. These challenges have all been taken on board in how the Preparatory Action is managed and streamlined in the follow-up calls and processes. The Spaces Labs, bringing aspiring

and experienced European Spaces of Culture participants together, play an important part to collect knowledge on what these challenges are and how collectively, project teams can find solutions.

The EUNIC team has brought several of these learnings together in a project idea design toolkit, which is used by participants during the early stages of the application process. Moreover, the EUNIC team has increased its monitoring efforts of the progress made by the project teams, with special attention to ensuring a broad information flow beyond the main project coordinator, and to putting emphasis on the importance of shared ownership and responsibility throughout the process of project design and implementation. The main challenges in managing these projects identified were:

- The various stakeholders had not all fully grasped the **cultural relations approach**. Some of the pilot projects still – albeit sporadically – show elements such as showcasing and dissemination, which potentially weakens the possibilities of a true cultural relations approach.
- All EU Delegation representatives appreciated the projects under European Spaces of Culture, recognised their value but weren’t always certain about their role in these big collaborations or felt ill-equipped to get engaged. Representatives from the EU Delegations mentioned four key factors to strengthen their role in cultural relations projects: a) better communication, b) a clear political will from senior management, c) additional human resources, and d) the freedom to adapt to the local context. Multi-annual programming and funding at country and regional level offers room for adapting and learning from the European Spaces of Culture model, and inclusion of culture as a strategic vector for international partnerships.
- These intercultural and multi-institutional collaborations are inherently complex and require increased communication between all stakeholders. In some cases, participants mentioned a lack of communication between headquarters and the local entities and between the project partners themselves.
- In some of the projects the model of collaboration wasn’t discussed and developed explicitly during the implementation phase – with the result that the European partners took the lead. Different stakeholders wished for a clarification of roles and responsibilities in European Spaces of Culture projects.
- Not all pilot projects succeeded in involving the local partner organisations equally in the project management. Stakeholders in these projects sometimes expressed concerns about a lack of relevance to local target groups.
- The work of local EUNIC members is currently only assessed according to their individual objectives. Different stakeholders mentioned the challenge to work and think in a European way if the national strategies override a European strategy.
- The 12-18 months long preparation and project implementation period allows enough time to establish a working collaboration, engage local partners, enhance the project design, define further goals, attract, and include additional partners, and see first results. But the investment and effort wouldn’t pay off if the project support stopped at this point.

The Preparatory Action and its pilot projects demonstrate the potential of collaboration based on mutual listening and learning, openness to new approaches, and generosity towards partners. We are looking forward to continuing and strengthening this model of collaboration, both in Brussels and with partners worldwide.



EUNIC

EU National Institutes
for Culture

EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture – is the European network of organisations engaging in cultural relations from all EU Member States and associate countries. Through culture, we strive to build trust and understanding between the people of Europe and the wider world. We work to make culture count in international relations.



European Spaces of Culture

European Spaces of Culture (2019-2023) is testing innovative collaboration models in cultural relations between European and local partner organisations in countries outside the EU. At the heart of the project lies a commitment to a new spirit of dialogue, in which equality, mutual listening and learning represent the core values that help build trust and understanding between peoples. It was initiated by the European Parliament as a Preparatory Action and attributed to EUNIC by the European Commission.

By testing and evaluating innovative cultural relations work worldwide and gathering policy and practice recommendations, the project contributes to driving the implementation of the EU strategic approach to international cultural relations.

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