

Culture Action Europe Strategy 2025-2027

BACKGROUND

Culture Action Europe (CAE) celebrates its 30th birthday in 2024. Since its inception, CAE's main goal, its 'raison d'être', remains as relevant as ever: to maintain continuous dialogue and knowledge exchange between the cultural sector in Europe and policymakers. What has changed though is the perception of CAE: today we are widely recognised for our leading role in advocating culture 'in Brussels', Europe and beyond. For us, this represents a huge responsibility and an ongoing commitment to serve our sectors towards achieving better working conditions, to fight for a broad recognition and a central role of culture in all policy areas and to support plural and inclusive cultural democracies.

As a network of cultural associations, public and independent organisations and individuals, CAE sees the diversity of the cultural and creative sectors as a strength. However, policymakers tend to favour engaging in structured dialogues with a single representative organisation. As a network of cultural associations, public and independent organisations and individuals, CAE aims to provide this central platform for dialogue with politicians while remaining inclusive of all areas of culture. Therefore, beyond its broad membership, CAE establishes and maintains structural partnerships with major initiatives such as EIT-KIC, focussing on creativity and innovation, as well as partners beyond the cultural sector like Civil Society Europe or United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

The previous strategic plan (2022-2024) covered a period in which CAE had consolidated its position and the stability of the organisation and encouraged the executive committee to set new ambitions for CAE: to develop a stronger focus for our activities, demonstrate ethical leadership in times of poli- and perma-crisis, strategically empower our membership and expand our political impact through renewed and new partnerships.

This strategy comes at a time when the crises of the last decade have become more existential: the climate emergency, health crises, social inequality, migration, big tech and threats to democracy heavily impact our societies. The cultural sector suffers in this context, yet simultaneously it is equipped to be an essential part of the solution by producing new

knowledge, applying critical thinking, and developing new narratives and future images. Culture disrupts, inspires, fosters social cohesion, increases our ability to live with ambiguities, work through traumatic pasts, make contested heritage fruitful, create jobs, care for people, and reimagine our economies and societies at large.

The present strategic plan also covers a period in which transnational cultural policies are impacted by a new political reality in Europe and globally, with European Parliament elections and the appointment of a new European Commission in 2024, the United Nations Conference on the Future (to answer the question of what comes after 2030) and UNESCO's launch of a Framework for Culture and Education.

CAE has discussed in depth and in a structured manner, how to confront and contribute to this context as a political voice of the cultural field: a first version of this strategic document has been developed by the Secretary General and the President of CAE. It has been discussed with the board and the team and reworked into a version that was presented during the Members Forum of the 2023 Beyond the Obvious conference (BTO) in Elefsina, where members provided detailed feedback during a facilitated Open Space session. This has led to the present version that focuses on four action areas, two key concepts and 3 thematic areas for CAE's activities in the period 2025-27.

PROFILE

Culture Action Europe (CAE) is the major European network of cultural networks, organisations, artists, cultural workers, activists, academics and policymakers. As the only intersectoral network, it brings together members and strategic partners from all areas of culture¹. Culture Action Europe is the political voice of the cultural sector in Europe, the first port of call for informed opinion and debate about arts and cultural policy.

VISION

Culture Action Europe is driven by its belief in culture as a fundamental building block for the common future of a Europe open to the world, for the sustainability of our planet and for plural, open and caring societies.

MISSION

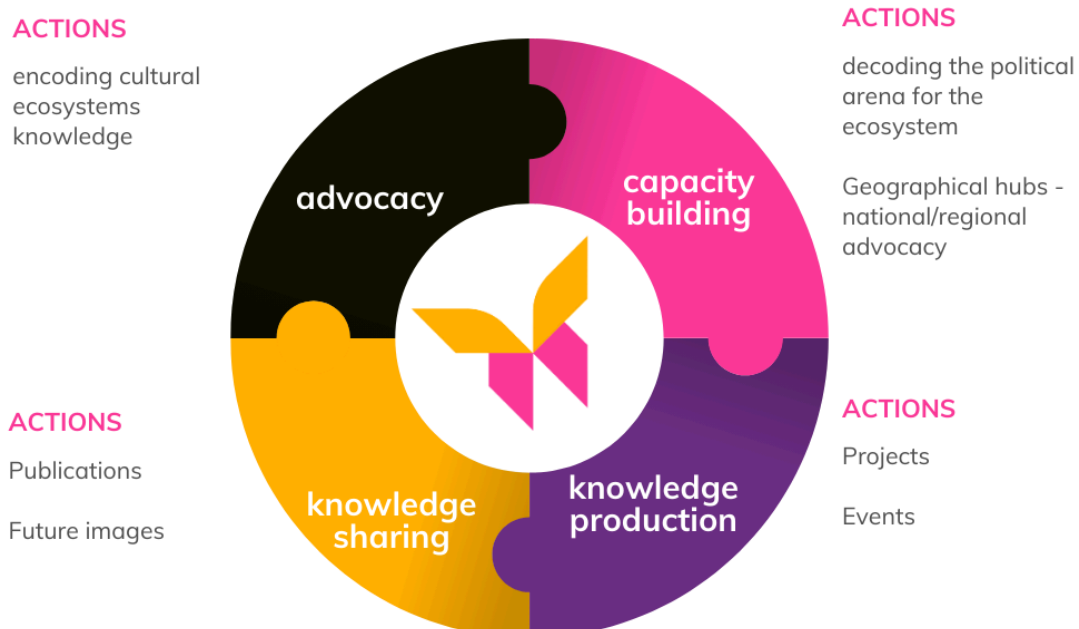
Culture Action Europe maintains an ongoing dialogue and knowledge sharing between the European cultural sector and policymakers. CAE advocates for transformative cultural policies that recognise and support culture as a sector in its own right and a catalyst contributing to other sectors.

¹ from the performing arts to literature, the visual arts, design, film, media and cross-arts initiatives, arts venues, community centres and activist groups, to industries, heritage, education and research.

FOUR ACTION AREAS

To achieve its mission, CAE focuses on the following actions that form our knowledge ecosystem and are part of an impact cycle:

- Advocacy and representation
- Capacity Building (networking, collaboration, discourse)
- Knowledge Production
- Knowledge Sharing



KEY CONCEPTS 2025-2027

By integrating the concepts of "care" and "beyond" into its strategy, CAE demonstrates a commitment to a cultural ecosystem that is sustainable, inclusive, and democratic. This approach not only considers present needs but envisions and prepares for a future where culture is fundamental to thriving societies.

The term Beyond is familiar to the CAE community: during its annual conference members gather under the premise to look 'Beyond The Obvious'. Today we live in times of extraordinary promise and peril, where even 'the obvious' is often out of sight: Europe stands at a crossroads between democracy and autocracy, opportunity and stagnation, cultural vitality and cultural indifference, shared identity and propaganda. At the same time long-term visions in policy making are still limited (often to the 2030 timeframe, SDGs, European Semester, etc.) Meanwhile, the Conference on the Future of Europe (initiated by the von der Leyen Commission) that had set out to provide a long-term vision does not include culture in its outcomes. How can we envision our future(s) beyond the present, steering clear of clichés and technological determinism? Do we dare to imagine a Europe unbounded by convention and manage to make the role of culture apparent in achieving this vision?

During the 2023 edition of the Beyond the Obvious gathering, our members collaboratively co-authored the Elefsina Manifesto on Care. This exercise on values was an exemplar of the co-creative and inter-subjective strength of our network. It represents a strong political, but also ethical, commitment demonstrating how we want to work. The Manifesto will serve as a reminder and we will collectively revisit it regularly to sharpen our sense of direction in a volatile world. It will help us further our discussions on the ethics that frame our vision of cultural leadership.

THREE THEMATIC AREAS

To fulfil its mission of maintaining ongoing dialogue and advocating for transformative cultural policies, CAE has identified three thematic areas for the strategic period 2025-2027, which will guide all of our programs, activities, and advocacy efforts:

- Democracy and Leadership
- Sustainable Development
- The Cultural Ecosystem

Democracy and Leadership

Cultural Democracy, -rights and citizenship, as set out in the Porto Santo Charter, need to be turned into action for a future where democracies thrive on diverse voices and identities that are not only respected, but nurtured and celebrated. Benefits of cultural participation and creation must be accessible to all and shared widely.

CAE will advocate for policies and engage in initiatives that support culture-driven social innovation and foster more inclusive societies. CAE will support policy decisions that are driven by ethical considerations, empowering communities to actively participate in shaping cultural narratives and policies for a sustainable and democratic future. This will necessarily include international collaboration beyond Europe. This theme also contributes to the empowerment of our sectors to take a leadership role in the transformation of our societies. In this capacity, CAE will take the lead in coordinating the joint actions with other European cultural networks.

By envisioning a cultural landscape beyond the one we currently operate within, this theme contributes to the empowerment of our sectors to take a leadership role in the transformation of our societies.

Sustainable Development

The contribution of culture to sustainable development is both complementing and cross-cutting the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainability.

CAE will advocate for a strong cultural sector that contributes to the sustainable development of our planet and for the role of culture as a vector that crosscuts all other sectors as an enabler. This plea is reflected in CAE's flagship campaign A Cultural Deal for Europe that demands a properly empowered EU Commissioner for Culture that can support the cultural sector as a strong enabler for the necessary achievements in other policy areas. In the Cultural Goal campaign we focus on a stand-alone SDG for Culture, that similarly will act as an enabler for other SDGs. Prominent examples for this enabling role include the health and well-being sector (SDG 3) as well as climate action (SDG 13) or more inclusive societies (SDG 5 and 10).

The Cultural Ecosystem

The Cultural Ecosystem is a complex web of relations between practitioners, projects, organisations, funders, supply chains, stakeholders and society at large. Working conditions within the ecosystem are precarious and economic pressure on institutions poses existential threats,- as do other external factors such as the role of big-tech and the establishment of artificial intelligence.

CAE will advocate for fair working conditions for cultural practitioners, as well as appropriate support for projects and organisations that act as a transformative force for a sustainable future. By nurturing a sense of care for artists' livelihoods and fostering well-being through foresight-driven policies, the cultural sector can contribute to a resilient and socially vibrant future, beyond what is available to the sector today.

We will rethink the well-being of the cultural ecosystem through an ethical approach to care. Reimagining the cultural ecosystem beyond the precarity of today requires collaborative knowledge production, sharing of best practices and innovative ideas and supporting research and innovation emerging from cultural practices.