

## The promise of a garden

### Culture Action Europe: where culture meet politics

*»Individually we are one drop; together we are an ocean.«*

*Ryūnosuke Akutagawa*

I like to think about Culture Action Europe as a permaculture garden - a network of interconnected species that are diverse in their appearance, practice and objectives. Some like sunny spots, others flourish in humid spaces hidden under dry leaves, and others need collaboration in order to survive. What brings them together is a shared ecosystem of alliance, partnership and mutual exchange. And a common vision that culture is fundamental vector for equal, sustainable and free societies.

Culture is, fundamentally, a process nurtured collectively. It exists as part of the wider environment and it is anchored in interdependence between artists and society. Just as social and economic conditions determine cultural practices, culture needs to be in a dialogue with the lives we live. Recognising this interconnectedness of culture with politics, systemic thinking and social tissue are crucial. A holistic strategy is needed, as the cultural dimension cannot be forgotten in tackling societal, environmental and economic challenges that need transversal and multidisciplinary responses.

Culture Action Europe offers this crossroad. As the major European network of cultural networks, artists, activists, academics and policy-makers, Culture Action Europe's mission is to advocate the arts and culture as a fundamental building block of the common future of Europe and beyond. Our network enables us to research the multiple natures of cultural practices, to interact and mediate in order to ease effective policy-level communications and to share our collective knowledge and expertise. Culture Action Europe believes in the value and values of culture and its contribution to the development of sustainable and inclusive societies.

We are a community with people at its centre and active policies of care, and a network that works at the service of culture and cultural practices. We identify plural, inclusive, accessible, free and sustainable approaches in order to question and transform cultural policies, production models and structures. We create common spaces for the fair sharing of knowledge based on the diversity of cultural practices, structural forms and interests of the different members.

We make resources accessible, share them equally and empower members. We are constantly in search of diversity to reduce vulnerability and to learn from the multiple nature of cultural practices. We think of ourselves as a community of practices with decentralised leadership, diverse skills and different levels of expertise and participation.

Cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary approaches that cross boundaries and work at the fringes inspire our advocacy work. Freedom of artistic expression, working and living conditions of artists and cultural workers, culture's role in sustainable development, sustainability of our practices and our sector, as well as access to and participation in cultural life as a basic human right and essential dimension of *buen vivir* and that of well-being of societies are main domains of our actions. As the major campaigner for advancing (including financing of) arts and culture in Europe, we work with a wide range of audiences: moving beyond the cultural sphere we interact with policy-makers, wider civil-society organisations, academics, researchers, activists. Our public campaigns propose overarching political frameworks that put culture at the centre of public-debate and policy-making at the EU and national levels.

Following closely European political and policy debates, Culture Action Europe actively engages with these processes and brings the cultural sector on board and across. One vivid example of this is our »Amplify: Make the Future of Europe Yours«<sup>1</sup> campaign that raises awareness and strategically involves marginalised and underrepresented communities in the cultural sector to participate in the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE).

The campaign listens to and amplifies voices, ideas, proposals and concerns of underrepresented communities across the continent on the vision of the future of Europe. The project relies on collaboration and energy at the community level: through a series of participatory sessions the campaign will elaborate a set of recommendations addressed to the EU decision-makers, thus contributing to the CoFoE. The Amplify campaign also aims at initiating an open public debate around inclusive, democratic processes in decision-making to better represent the diverse European population and diminish inequalities in Europe and beyond.

With the vision of bringing culture and politics in a meaningful and effective dialogue, aiming at cross-fertilising the cultural sector with civic, environmental and economic spheres, Culture Action Europe proposes holistic frameworks for actions. Together with the European Cultural Foundation<sup>2</sup>, and Europa Nostra<sup>3</sup> (representing the European Heritage Alliance<sup>4</sup>), we are jointly advocating for a new Cultural Deal for Europe (#CulturalDealEU), an overarching framework that should demonstrate the EU's political commitment to place culture at the

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<sup>1</sup> Amplify: Make the Future of Europe Yours: <https://cultureactioneurope.org/projects/amplify-make-the-future-of-europe-yours/>

<sup>2</sup> European Cultural Foundation: <https://culturalfoundation.eu/>

<sup>3</sup> Europa Nostra: <https://www.europanostra.org/>

<sup>4</sup> European Heritage Alliance: <https://europeanheritagealliance.eu/>

heart of the European project. The Cultural Deal for Europe<sup>5</sup> has the ambition to be a political message in the first place, as was the Federal Writers' Project that U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt included in its post-Great Depression New Deal across the Atlantic. Today's Cultural Deal for Europe is a call from a wider European cultural community to acknowledge the pivotal role of culture in shaping the future of our lives in common.

The #CulturalDealEU is now open for public endorsements<sup>6</sup>, we invite you to support this call, by signing.<sup>7</sup>

With similar actions and interactions, Culture Action Europe creates spaces, physical and virtual platforms with doors open for joint advocacy, exchange and collaboration. These connections sometimes thrive fast and visible, sometimes take more time to get rooted and might be developing beyond the eyesight. But sooner or later they will bloom in an abundant garden.

### **Author**

***Natalie Giorgadze** is a community manager and communications specialist with solid experience in the non-for-profit sector. Attracted by power of words, she passionately searches for new, creative and effective ways of telling stories, stories that inspire and motivate to act. Before joining Culture Action Europe, Natalie worked as communications officer for Women in Development Europe and as freelance writer and project developer at Indigo, a cross-media project. Her previous NGO experience includes working for human rights and environmental networks. Natalie is trained as a journalist and holds a graduate degree in Cultures and Development studies.*

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### **Redaktion**

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<sup>5</sup> The Cultural Deal for Europe, #CulturalDealEU Campaign:

<https://cultureactioneurope.org/projects/culturaldealeu-campaign/>

<sup>6</sup> Endorse the #CulturalDealEU now!: <https://cultureactioneurope.org/projects/culturaldealeu-campaign/support-culturaldealeu/>

<sup>7</sup> Giorgadze, Natalie: Ein »Cultural Deal for Europe« Für eine Wiederbelebung Europas durch Kultur. »Kulturpolitische Mitteilungen«, 172-I/2021, p. 29: <https://kupoge.de/kumi/pdf/172/kumi172.pdf>