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## CREATIVE FLIP (CULTURE) POLICY ORIENTATIONS IN TIMES OF RAPID CHANGE\*

# Culture Spaces & Democracy

Issue 1, February 2025

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## Culture Spaces & Democracy

The EU is still the largest group of democracies, but the world is facing rapid social, economic, technological and geopolitical change impacting strongly democratic frameworks. These changes require good and rapid responses by policy- and decision-makers as well as stakeholders.

In the context of Creative FLIP, a strategic EU project, we aim at supporting good (culture) policy-making in the European Union. With the series of CREATIVE FLIP (CULTURE) POLICY ORIENTATIONS, we explore some of the main challenges in the European Union with the objective to better integrate culture (policy) in transformation areas. To do this, we make use of the Creative FLIP Collaborative Transformation Policy Approach<sup>1</sup>, developed in 2023 and which identifies 8 elements of good (cultural) policy making in transformational times. We refer to annex 1 for further information about the framework.

In this policy orientation paper, we specifically focus on the role of transformational (cultural) policy making – in particular related to (cultural) spaces – in safeguarding democracy.

## The importance for democracy of enhanced interaction in safe physical, hybrid and digital (culture) spaces

Based on the Creative FLIP Collaborative Transformation Policy Approach, we conducted a light desk research on the topic of “Culture Spaces & Democracy”, making use of the 8 guiding elements of good transformation policy-making. The following table provides a range of insights gained from this desk research, as well as questions which arise from some of the concepts. The insights and reflections are aimed to feed a first set of policy orientations in the thematic field of “Culture Spaces & Democracy” as well as further debate in the context of the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/assets/upload/CREATIVE\\_FLIP\\_Transformation\\_Policies\\_FINAL\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/assets/upload/CREATIVE_FLIP_Transformation_Policies_FINAL__1_.pdf)

## 8 guiding elements for good policy making with respect to culture spaces and their role in democracy

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Science-based</b> | Democracy is declining worldwide, and in the EU. An increasing number of populations live in autocracies having evolved from 48% to 71% of people in non-democratic frameworks in one decade <sup>2</sup> . Culture can deploy strong positive effects for the maintenance and development of democracy. Culture is able to enhance likelihood to vote, trust, and solve conflict: There is a clear and positive correlation between rates of citizens' participation in cultural activities and indicators of civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion <sup>3</sup> . This participation materialises in physical, hybrid and digital places of interaction. |
| <b>Eco-systemic</b>  | Digital technologies have manifold influences on interaction spaces. They can foster democratic processes like citizens engagement and greater accountability, but can also be tools for manipulations related to reliable election information and to entrench power hierarchies <sup>4</sup> . However, the well-functioning of democracy requires the participation of all. Models using creative and narrative practices such as for example theatre of the oppressed and speculative design could provide inclusive approaches <sup>5</sup> .   |
| <b>Value-driven</b>  | Key democratic values are transparency, civic freedoms, and participative decision-making. This open governance approach is a key driver of citizens' confidence in their governments <sup>6</sup> . Civic freedoms and rights must be protected for people to fully participate in public life <sup>7</sup> . Maintaining a healthy civic space, both on- and offline, is a prerequisite for good governance and democracy <sup>8</sup> . Public spaces are greatly important for the enjoyment and exercise of human rights in general, and are particularly relevant for cultural rights <sup>9</sup> .   |
| <b>Collaborative</b> | Two democratic logics, one revolving around the territorial state and another one focused on collaborative networks of stakeholders, can be considered. For the later, this collaborative governance approach could be a supplement to traditional Weberian bureaucracy and New Public Management. Related questions may include legitimacy and accountability <sup>10</sup> . Collaboration implies also procedural rules or norms. The concepts of "Culture of Public Space" and "Public Space of Culture" are interesting in this regard <sup>11</sup> .  |

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/strategic-agenda-2024-2029/#democratic>

<sup>3</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/07370fba-110d-11ee-b12e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.idea.int/theme/digitalization-and-democracy>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101094217>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/open-government-and-citizen-participation.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/open-government-and-citizen-participation.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/open-government-and-citizen-participation.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-cultural-rights/cultural-rights-and-public-spaces>

<sup>10</sup> Hansen, M. P., Triantafillou, P., & Christensen, S. H. (2022). Two logics of democracy in collaborative governance: a mapping of clashes and compromises. *Public Management Review*, 26(3), 635–656.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2107696>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg-public\\_space-think\\_piece.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg-public_space-think_piece.pdf) (page 12)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Urgent</b>                                 | Civic spaces are under pressure due to repressive laws <sup>12</sup> while mitigation measures are not fully in place <sup>13</sup> . In 2024, over 118 countries placed serious restrictions on civil society <sup>14</sup> . Furthermore, the elections for the next European Parliament take place in 2029. Policy actions to further democracy – in order to generate impact before the election period – need to start in 2025. These activities might also link to the pending electoral reforms in the European Union like European transnational lists or same voting age <sup>15</sup> .  |
| <b>Behavioral patterns</b>                    | Feelings about democracy differ from status of democracy. More dissatisfied are those who think that economy is bad, that the financial situation of people has decreased or that democratic norms are not respected. But these feelings have little relationship to external assessments and their results <sup>16</sup> . Furthermore, characteristics of public spaces matter, motivating or limiting social exchange. Aesthetic levels of space are linked with people's perceptions of the public environment <sup>17</sup> .   |
| <b>Territory-specific &amp; International</b> | Based on Eurobarometer data, the state of satisfaction with democracy is very different in the European Union ranging from 79% of citizens satisfied in Denmark to 26% in Bulgaria <sup>18</sup> . Furthermore, respondents in rural areas are less satisfied with democracy than those living in large towns or cities <sup>19</sup> . On the international level, global democracy – referring to creating more democratic and inclusive mechanisms of global decision-making, either through reforming existing global institutions or establishing new ones – has entered a complex period <sup>20</sup> . Further insights provide initiatives aiming at decolonising perceptions of democracy e. g. by illuminating how citizens and popular organisations articulate the current crisis of democracy <sup>21</sup> .                |
| <b>Middle- to long-term</b>                   | Multiannual financial frameworks (MFF) define the context of budget and priorities in the European Union. Enhancing the role of democracy with culture requires an explicit attention which lacks in the current strategy agenda of the EU <sup>22</sup> and which cannot be taken for granted for the period 2028-2034 <sup>23</sup> . Democracy is a process requiring permanent engagement, as well-pointed out by Kofi Annan, former secretary general of the UN: "No one is born a good citizen, no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth." <sup>24</sup> Public (physical, hybrid, digital) spaces as social infrastructures are investments shaping the context of interaction and participation in the long run <sup>25</sup> . |

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2024/state-of-civil-society-report-2024\\_en.pdf](https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2024/state-of-civil-society-report-2024_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/a-new-wave-of-repression-on-civic-space/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2024/state-of-civil-society-report-2024\\_en.pdf](https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2024/state-of-civil-society-report-2024_en.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2023/739280/EPRS\\_IDA\(2023\)739280\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2023/739280/EPRS_IDA(2023)739280_EN.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/04/29/in-many-countries-dissatisfaction-with-democracy-is-tied-to-views-about-economic-conditions-personal-rights/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42413-024-00204-5>

<sup>18</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2966>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-12/Democracy\\_fl\\_522\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-12/Democracy_fl_522_report_en.pdf) (page 8) Flash Eurobarometer Democracy 2023

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/15892/on-the-two-dimensions-of-global-democracy/>

<sup>21</sup> Decolonising and re-theorising the meaning of democracy: A South African perspective:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0038026119878097?journalCode=sora>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/strategic-agenda-2024-2029/#democratic>

<sup>23</sup> <https://cultureactioneurope.org/advocacy/eu-funding-for-culture-in-the-multiannual-financial-framework-2028-2034/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy>

<sup>25</sup> <https://copa-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/blog/public-spaces-spaces-citizen-engagement-partnership-democratise-science-and-policy-new-jrc>

## A range of policy options to further democracy with culture interaction spaces

Based on the insights from the light desk research summarized in the previous chapter and further stakeholder exchanges in January 2025, we elaborated a selection of actions which policy-makers and stakeholders in the European Union should especially focus on.

- **Further cultural rights**, activism, artistic and other freedoms in the design and implementation of (culture) policy actions
- **Focus on those in need for more social interaction**, discriminated and marginalised in order to fully apply the integrative and social cohesion power of culture
- **Invest in place-based cultural development** taking into account democracy-sensitive approaches for related actions, accessibility and balance public and private interests
- **Continue to establish rules and regulations for the development of safe and democratic interaction spaces in hybrid and digital contexts** including enforcement and protection instruments
- **Ensure self-determination and sovereignty** by dedicating special attention to discriminated including in the design and implementation of culture policies and programmes.
- **Evolve CCS ecosystems as exemplary democratic places** ensuring cultural rights, representativeness, transparency and open governance
- **Dedicate attention and investment to non-city-centre-areas** in cultural policies and beyond in order to reduce factual and perceived development hierarchies of urban and non-urban territories.
- **Invest in improved international (culture) relations** in order to build on the exceptional power of culture to connect people from different continents and to organise international encounters
- **Connect better culture and positive European citizenship** by highlighting the advantages European cooperation brings for cultural cooperation and the understanding of inherent (historical, social, cultural, economic, ...) connectivity on the continent.
- **Invest in collaborative governance in culture and beyond** by developing better representativeness of the multilevel geographies of (culture) decision-makers in the EU and the generation of a common movements for culture and democracy

## Suggested short-term activities for democracy in the (culture) policy ecosystems in the European Union

In times of rapid change, (culture) policy action needs often to be fast. Based on the results of this paper as well as stakeholder exchanges in January 2025, we propose the following selection of short-term actions with potential to strengthen democracy in the EU (culture) ecosystems. These can also be the starting point for the preparation of coordinated actions for the next elections to the European Parliament.

### Options for short-term (EU) policy action related to culture spaces and democracy

**Creative Europe Work Programme 2026:** Introduce a **priority “Culture & Democracy”** to further strengthen the related potential of the cultural and creative sectors

**Creative Europe Work Programme 2026:** Introduce an **emergency fund** for art and culture under threat from non-democratic movements

**Proposals for funding instruments 2028-2034:** Take into account the **transversal contribution of culture to democracy** (e. g. EU Multiannual Financial Framework, rural development, regional development, education, other EU programmes)

**Hearing on Culture and Democracy in 2025:** Exchange with main European Culture and Civil Society Networks on concrete **effects of political changes on access to finance and on support to culture- and art-based democratic interaction spaces**

**Data on impact to culture of non-democratic action:** Collect and aggregate data e. g. from different **European culture networks to back arguments for the new generation of EU funding programmes**

**Pilot Project Cultural Rights (EU-Budget 2026):** Develop a practical implementation **guide and hotline** on cultural rights in EU (culture) policy-making and action

**Provide a list of rules-based and democratic digital spaces and campaign for a move-in of European culture (policy) stakeholders** on these platforms, spaces and tech solutions

**Pilot Project “Good Tech and Good Digital Label” (EU-Budget 2026):** Develop a quality label for **rules-based and democratic platforms, digital spaces and tech solutions.**

## Inspiring culture policies and practices

The following short presentation of good practices from Europe and beyond aims at further inspiring policy- and decision-makers in the European Union. The collection of inspiring practices is built on the main actions to further democracy by involving culture interaction spaces.

### **La Relève (France)**

A multiannual training and networking programme for new types of future (diverse) culture leaders for ensuring a better representativeness of different strata of populations in decision-making in main cultural institutions.<sup>26</sup>

### **ICORN – Cities of Refugees Network (International)**

An international network of cities providing safe havens for prosecuted artists and writers based on the understanding that the right to freedom of expression is crucial to living in a free, fair, and open society where people can access justice and exercise their human rights.<sup>27</sup>

### **Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples (Canada)**

A self-designed, managed and implemented funding programme of those underrepresented. The program supports Indigenous individuals, groups, Indigenous-led arts organizations and arts/cultural sector development organizations that foster a vital and resilient Indigenous arts ecosystem.<sup>28</sup>

### **Third Places – Houses for Culture and Exchange (Germany)**

Funding for open culture infrastructures for interaction with residents and related networking activities in rural areas with so far limited interaction opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

### **In Situ MOOC Cultural Rights (France)**

The (UN)COMMON SPACES project led by IN SITU from 2020 to 2024 has launched a MOOC on Cultural Rights in Public Space including topics like interdependent relationships and governance, licit and illicit appropriations, representations and power relations.<sup>30</sup>

### **Machines for Good: Engaging teenagers for democracy through AI and arts (Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium):**

The project's ambition is to contribute to release the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for civic purposes by using arts for engaging communities – and in particular teenagers - around issues of their interest, in line with the priority on e-democracy and innovative tools for democracy.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/fr/presse/dossiers-de-presse/La-Releve-ouvrir-la-culture-a-des-talents-plus-divers>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.icorn.org/about>

<sup>28</sup> <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/creating-knowing-sharing>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.dritteorte.nrw/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.in-situ.info/news/mooc-cultural-rights-in-public-space>

<sup>31</sup> <https://sineglossa.it/en/projects/machines-for-good/>

### **Creative Places (Ireland)**

A programme implemented by the Arts Council of Ireland targeting places that have not sustained investment in the arts and creativity.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Porto Santo Charter (Portugal; European Union)**

The Porto Santo Charter aims at cultural democracy in Europe. It is addressed to European policy makers; to cultural and educational organisations and institutions; and to European citizens to take responsibility for the resilience of democracy and a full cultural citizenship.<sup>33</sup>

### **Building the Missing Link (Africa-Europe Europe-Africa)**

Common policy recommendations from African and European culture stakeholders aiming at positive impacts from intercontinental relations for citizens on both continents and cultural relations that bring on board the people by providing access to the beauty of the continents and safe spaces of interaction.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.ie/creative-places/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://portosantocharter.eu/the-charter/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.salzkammergut-2024.at/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Policy-Recommendations-Better-Europe-Africa-Africa-Europe-Relations-Final-Nov-2024.pdf>



# About Creative FLIP



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Creative FLIP – Finance, Learning, Innovation and Intellectual Property Rights for CCSI is a Policy project, co-funded by the EU and project partners: Goethe-Institut (lead), the European Creative Hubs Network, IDEA Consult, and Intellectual Property Institute Luxembourg. Its goal is to support the CCSI actors by increasing their **long-term resilience** and preparing them to **tackle future disruptions** and **transformation processes**.

Its comprehensive approach involves research, collaborative transformation policy recommendations (green, digital, democratic), pooling of information and resources, peer learning, innovative actions in key areas such as **Finance, Learning, Working conditions, Innovation, and Intellectual Property Rights**.

<http://www.CreativeFLIP.eu>

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Special thanks to Isabelle De Voldere, IDEA Consult, as well as to the FLIP team for feedback and support!

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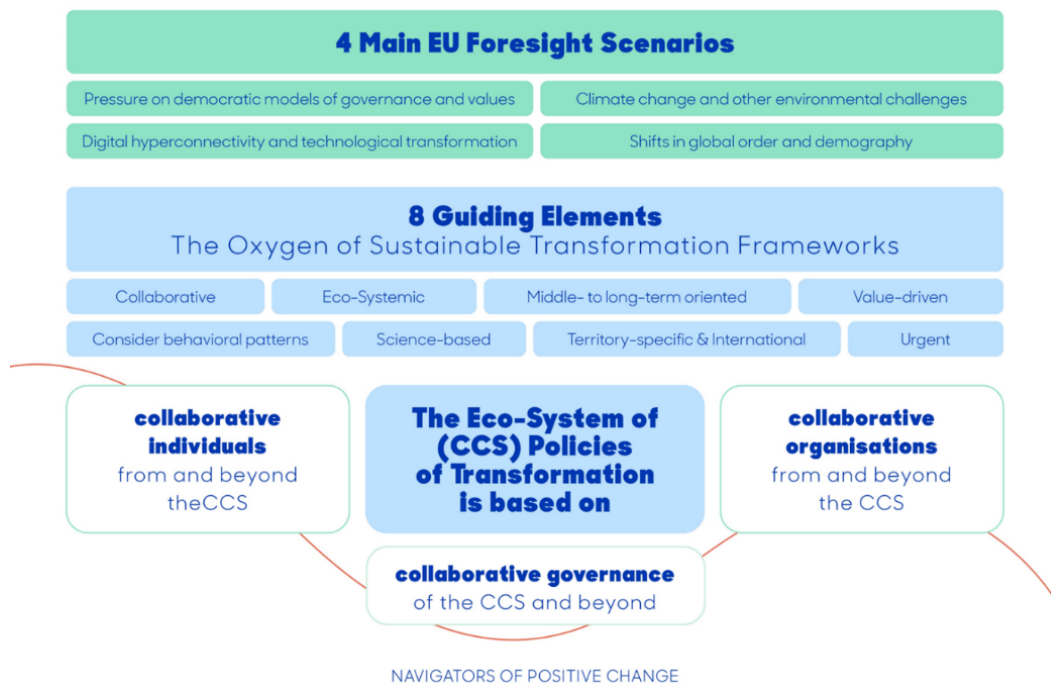
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## Annex 1: What are Collaborative Transformation Policies?

Collaborative transformation policies are defined - for the purpose of this paper - as cross-sectoral endeavours involving the CCS (policies). These policies are not solely oriented by cultural objectives but engage in addition for a broader cause. Based on previous analysis of the EU foresight scenarios, four main areas of attention were considered: (1) Pressure on democratic models of governance and values (2) Climate change and other environmental challenges (3) Digital hyperconnectivity and technological transformation (4) Shifts in global order and demography. Furthermore, a set of eight elements were recommended to be taken into account by all partners of the eco-system for CCS policies of transformation.

### Transformation Policies Frameworks<sup>35</sup>



Deploying the full potential of the CCS for society and economy requires updated policy orientations from two angles. For the context of the European Union this implies the following changes of perspectives and actions: CCS policy makers need to more broadly consider the role of the CCS (policies) in transformation areas. The strategic EU policy-making framework needs to broaden the understanding and recognition of the CCS as an ally for positive changemaking.

## Background Information

**\* Nota bene:** The Creative FLIP (Culture) Policy Orientations are based on the Collaborative Transformation Policy Approach<sup>36</sup> aiming at bringing forward simplified methodologies to accelerate policy responses to most pressing agendas in the context of the development of the European Union. Issue 1 “Culture Spaces & Democracy” included a light desk research, a comprehensive stakeholder workshop as well as the collection of good (policy) practices. These policy orientations are published in order to feed further discussion and to provide timely input for the negotiations for the upcoming EU funding period 2028-2034. They will be included in transversal Creative FLIP policy recommendations due to be finalised in the year 2026.

<sup>35</sup> [https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/assets/upload/CREATIVE\\_FLIP\\_Transformation\\_Policies\\_FINAL\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/assets/upload/CREATIVE_FLIP_Transformation_Policies_FINAL__1_.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> [https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/assets/upload/CREATIVE\\_FLIP\\_Transformation\\_Policies\\_FINAL\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/assets/upload/CREATIVE_FLIP_Transformation_Policies_FINAL__1_.pdf)