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RECOVERY,  
RESILIENCE,  
RESISTANCE

CULTURAL  
SUPPORT  
PLATFORMS  
IN TIMES OF  
CRISIS



Afternoon appetizers outside BASIS © Samira Mosca

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Curated and produced by  
European Creative Hubs  
Network.



This publication documents the talks, discussions, ideas and exchanges that took place during the ECHN Hubs Meetup **BauTopia 6: Cultural Support Platforms in Times of Crisis – Recovery, Resilience, Resistance**, held from 15–17 October 2025 at BASIS in Silandro, Italy. The conference was organized with the generous support of the BASIS team.

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# RECOVERY, RESILIENCE, RESISTANCE

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CULTURAL SUPPORT PLATFORMS IN TIMES OF  
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## CULTURAL SUPPORT PLATFORMS IN TIMES OF CRISES

Today, cultural and creative structures, especially creative hubs, face a rapidly changing and fragile landscape. Long shaped by precarity, these spaces now confront rising real estate costs, unstable relationships with authorities, policy uncertainty, and the ongoing effects of global crises such as pandemics, war, and sociopolitical instability. These pressures threaten not only their operations but also their role as essential sites for civic life, artistic experimentation, and local resilience.

In response, creative hubs are rethinking how they operate, organize, and position themselves. The framework of **Recovery, Resilience, and Resistance** offers guidance: **Recovery** addresses restoring disrupted practices and rebuilding weakened cultural ecosystems; **Resilience** focuses on long-term strategies and governance to withstand future shocks; and **Resistance**

emphasizes advocacy, solidarity and asserting cultural value in the face of marginalization and displacement.

Moving forward requires new coalitions, stronger collective capacities, and deliberate engagement with political, social, and economic contexts. Through cross-sector partnerships, institutional negotiation, and community-rooted advocacy, creative hubs can reposition themselves as vital contributors to urban development, social cohesion and alternative economic futures.

Key questions arise: How can creative spaces be developed, sustained, and protected in volatile contexts? How can agility and adaptability become long-term practices, rather than short-term fixes? What tools are needed to effectively engage with authorities and stakeholders? How can local initiatives amplify their voices in broader policy debates? And how can translocal and international networks support long-term access to cultural infrastructure?

This publication brings together contributions from the Hubs Meetup –

Bautopia 6 conference, which took place from 15 to 17 October in Silandro, Italy, under the title “**Recovery – Resilience – Resistance**: Cultural Support Platforms in Times of Crisis,” conceived as both theme and guiding methodology. The conference was organised by the European Creative Hubs Network in collaboration with the host organisation BASIS Creative Hub.

Developed through dialogue, these texts continue the conversation beyond the event, evolving with the questions raised. By engaging these issues, the publication offers practical insights, strengthens solidarity, and reinforces the importance of safeguarding cultural spaces as engines of creativity, inclusion, and democratic renewal, places where alternative futures can be imagined, tested, and collectively sustained.

The first contribution discusses the transformation of BASIS into a creative hub, and how temporary cultural initiatives can become lasting strategies for community development. The second text presents the case of the Pueblo Museo in Genalguacil, Spain, showing how art and cultural participation revitalized a rural village and

strengthened its local economy. The third intervention explains how a grassroots movement in Upper Vinschgau evolved into a citizen cooperative promoting sustainable agriculture and regional resilience. The following text introduces a model from Popdistrict Den Haag for addressing cultural controversies through dialogue and responsible programming.

The fifth contribution explores the Future DiverCities project, highlighting how artistic and participatory practices can regenerate unused urban spaces in a sustainable way. The next text describes Vienna's Free Spaces initiative, which supports non-commercial public cultural events while maintaining grassroots creativity. What follows is a presentation of the Stelvio project, focusing on cultural initiatives and community participation to strengthen rural resilience. We continue by looking at the outlines of Ambassadors of Good Practice, a European programme promoting exchange among rural cultural practitioners to support regeneration. Eventually, the final text highlights discussions on collaboration, solidarity and shared learning as key factors for resilient cultural communities.





The BASIS complex from above © BASIS

## PERMANENT TEMPORARY – TOURING BASIS

Ten years ago, the vision of BASIS was born: a former fascist barracks, originally built in the 1930s on land expropriated from the local community, transformed into a hub for creativity, urban development, circularity, and social growth. What had once been agricultural fields belonging to local residents became a military complex, first used by Italian troops, later occupied by German forces during the war, and again by Italian troops, remaining a military facility until roughly the 1990s before being abandoned.

In the heart of the community, and now for the community, what was once a “non-place” has been reimaged as a playground for experimentation and self-realization.

For many years (from 1990’s to 2015) the building remained empty. It was owned by the province, which eventually sold it to the municipality due to financial pressures. In this way, the property returned to the local

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**Anna Hilber** is a communication and cultural management professional based in South Tyrol, Italy. She serves as Vice President of the association behind BASIS Vinschgau Venosta and works on project curation, communication, and cultural programming. Her work focuses on connecting community initiatives, cultural projects, and international networks within the European creative sector.

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**BASIS Vinschgau Venosta**, located in the repurposed Drusus barracks in Silandro, South Tyrol, is a dynamic hub for social innovation and creativity. Founded to transform a historically significant site into a community-centered space, BASIS combines business, education, culture, and social engagement. Its mission is to foster sustainable regional development by empowering individuals and groups to actively shape their local environment.

**basis.space**

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community as public property. Initially, the site was imagined primarily as a real estate development that would provide additional housing for the town of Silandro. However, before such plans could be realized, the municipality sought ways to activate the space in the meantime. A public call invited proposals for temporary use, and one of the ideas that emerged was to transform the former fascist barracks into a social activation and creative hub that would shift the narrative surrounding the site.

This proposal was put forward by Hannes Gutsch, the founder of BASIS. Born and raised in Silandro, he had reached a point in his life where he faced an important decision: either leave South Tyrol or create the conditions that would allow him to remain in his hometown. The opportunity to develop BASIS provided a way to stay and contribute something meaningful to the local community.

The idea was to establish a space dedicated to social innovation and creativity. The municipality supported this approach, particularly because it introduced a broader understanding of innovation that extended

beyond purely technological or economic frameworks. The context of the region also played an important role. The Venosta Valley, despite being part of a generally wealthy region, is one of its economically weaker areas. The local landscape and economy are strongly shaped by apple monoculture, which influences not only the environment but also the social and economic life of the community. Creating new forms of cultural and economic activity therefore became an important motivation behind the project.

To realize this vision, a strategic approach was necessary. It was clear from the beginning that such a project could not be built by a single association acting alone. Instead, Hannes Gutsch collaborated directly with the municipality and began developing the project from within the local administration. BASIS therefore initially started as a municipal project. The building remains publicly owned, but over time BASIS evolved into an independent association. Today the association rents the building from the municipality and fills it with programming, activities, and initiatives.

The work of BASIS is organized around three main pillars: rentals, services, and events. The rental component involves providing spaces within the complex for a wide variety of uses. The second pillar consists of innovation services that support entrepreneurs and creative professionals. These services include assistance with navigating administrative requirements, obtaining licenses, developing business plans, and shaping project ideas. BASIS also offers educational opportunities, mentoring, and exchange formats that help founders and innovators develop their initiatives.

The third pillar focuses on events, with a strong emphasis on cultural programming. One of the central spaces is the “Casino Club,” located in the underground level of the building. This modular venue hosts a wide range of activities, from dance classes for senior citizens to club nights, conferences, and even weddings. In addition to local events, BASIS participates in regional and international projects. It contributes to initiatives such as Driving Urban Transitions and collaborates with networks like Trans Europe Halls. The

organization also participates in Erasmus+ programs and develops smaller regional projects that support niche and night culture.

Across all of these activities, the emphasis is on community activation and the creation of an alternative cultural sphere within the valley, one that values experimentation, subculture, and non-mainstream initiatives. The facility also offers spaces for creative exploration, including a printing laboratory, ceramics workshop, digital lab, kitchen space, and woodworking workshop. These facilities allow people to experiment, develop ideas, and transform them into concrete projects with the support of infrastructure, expertise, and guidance.

Over time, BASIS has become an important point of attraction for the entire region. It brings together people with diverse backgrounds, including individuals who were born in South Tyrol, left for some time, and later returned, as well as international residents who have chosen to live in the area. The space provides an environment where people feel accepted and free to pursue their ideas, collaborate with others,

and attempt to create positive change in the region.

The philosophy behind the project can be described as a form of social urbanism, grounded in openness, inclusiveness, and interaction. BASIS seeks to create an atmosphere where curiosity and experimentation are encouraged and where people feel comfortable exploring new experiences. Beyond its cultural dimension, the organization also offers practical resources for research, creative work, and cross-sector collaboration. It is currently the only institution in South Tyrol specifically dedicated to supporting cross-innovation and social innovation, fields that connect economic development, ecological sustainability, social change, education, and culture.

Like many organizations in the cultural and creative sector, BASIS faces several challenges. One of the most significant is the broader political and societal shift toward more exclusionary and individualistic attitudes. The organization tries to counter these tendencies by promoting openness, collaboration, and community engagement.

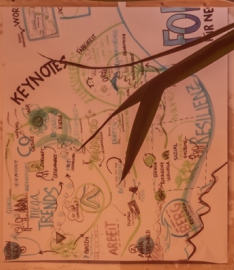
Financial sustainability is another ongoing challenge, as cultural institutions often operate with limited resources and uncertain funding structures.

There are also challenges related to the physical site itself. The original redevelopment plan for the barracks area included demolishing several of the remaining buildings to construct private housing. BASIS is working to demonstrate the value of preserving the existing open spaces and infrastructure, as well as the cultural and social benefits the organization brings to the region. Through dialogue with the municipality and public engagement, the team seeks greater recognition of the importance of maintaining at least part of the site as a shared community space.

Looking ahead, BASIS intends to continue developing its work as a long-term project focused on social healing and collective transformation. The barracks were built on land that had been taken from the local community, and this historical reality still resonates in the region. One of the ongoing goals is therefore to reconnect the community with the place and to create

opportunities for people to reclaim and reshape the space in meaningful ways.

At the same time, BASIS aims to strengthen its international connections and expand collaborations with practitioners from other regions and countries. Hosting guests, facilitating exchanges, and remaining open to new ideas and partnerships are central to the organization's approach. Rather than rigidly planning every step, the project embraces flexibility, responding to emerging opportunities and continuing to evolve alongside the community it serves.





Hodei Herreros presents 'Facing the wall: turning around' at the Genalguacil Art Encounters (2024)  
© Nerea Ubieta/Metropolis

## PLACING CULTURE AT THE HEART OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Genalguacil is a small village of just 500 inhabitants in southern Spain, that has undergone an extraordinary cultural transformation. Nestled behind the Costa del Sol, it has become a place where heritage, contemporary art, and everyday life intersect, offering a powerful example of how creativity and community engagement can redefine the future of a rural territory.

In 1994, the village began to “rewrite its future” through the Encuentros de Arte, an initiative that invited artists to live and work alongside residents. Rather than treating art as something separate from daily life, the program embedded artistic practice within local traditions, public spaces, and collective memory. Streets, squares, and buildings became living artworks, shaped through collaboration between artists and the community. From the beginning, the project was driven not by financial

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**Miguel Ángel Herrera Gutiérrez** transitioned from a rural upbringing to engaging in entrepreneurship and public service. In 2011, he unexpectedly assumed the role of mayor of Genalguacil, leveraging his entrepreneurial acumen to revitalize the municipality. Notable achievements include the reopening of the Museum of Contemporary Art and spearheading cultural initiatives, positioning Genalguacil as a hub for contemporary art in Andalusia. His leadership led to the professionalization of artistic events, the creation of cultural festivals, and recognition by the Cultural Observatory of Spain.

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abundance but by imagination, persistence, and a shared vision.

Over time, a series of innovation programs expanded Genalguacil's cultural presence. The concept of "expanding exhibitions" dissolved the boundaries between museum spaces and the village itself, integrating contemporary art into streets, homes and everyday routines. Local artisans, blacksmiths, and other traditional practitioners worked alongside artists in workshops that explored themes such as light in the village, women's historical pathways, ceramics and limestone painting. This approach allowed residents to reclaim and reinterpret their heritage while actively contributing to contemporary cultural production.

A key milestone in this process was the transformation of a former olive mill into the Genalguacil Pueblo Museo, a fully functioning contemporary art museum developed in the face of significant institutional skepticism. Built through local initiative and community support, the museum became a symbol of determination and self-reliance. Since its creation, more than 300 artists have participated in

residencies, leaving permanent works embedded throughout the village and fostering ongoing dialogue and experimentation. Today, the museum and its associated programs attract over 20,000 visitors each year—an exceptional figure for a village of this size—and have earned recognition as one of Andalusia’s most significant cultural destinations, alongside major institutions such as the Picasso Museum and the Pompidou.

Community participation has remained central throughout Genalguacil’s evolution. Residents of all ages take part in workshops, exhibitions and artisan programs, ensuring that cultural development remains rooted in local knowledge and collective needs. This sustained engagement has revitalized not only the local economy and artistic life but also education, reversing a decline in school enrollment as families chose to settle in a village defined by cultural vitality. The experience of Genalguacil demonstrates that small, community-led initiatives can rival larger urban projects in terms of impact, sustainability and innovation.



To ensure long-term continuity, the village established an independent foundation dedicated to cultural development, allowing projects to endure beyond electoral cycles and political change. This structure supports long-term planning, high-quality programming, and participation in European and international collaborations.

Genalguacil now contributes to networks such as the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL) and Horizon Europe's Pacesetters consortium, exchanging knowledge, research and artistic residencies with rural communities across Europe.

The broader socio-economic impact of these cultural initiatives is evident throughout the village. Local artisans have developed sustainable businesses, young residents engage with both traditional practices and contemporary art, and the museum provides a platform for experimentation with circular economy principles, natural materials, and environmental awareness. Heritage, creativity, and innovation are interwoven into a cohesive model of resilient rural development.

Genalguacil's story is ultimately one of collective resilience and generosity. Even in moments of institutional resistance or sudden withdrawal of external support, the community has mobilized to sustain its projects, often through modest personal contributions and shared effort. The village stands as a testament to the transformative power of culture and art, demonstrating how small communities can thrive through collaboration, imagination, and determination, and offering an inspiring model for rural innovation across Europe.





Selling at a local farmers' market © da cooperative Upper Vinschgau

## A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE COMMUNITY – A COMMUNITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The **da – Citizen Cooperative of Upper Vinschgau** emerged from a grassroots civil rights movement known as the **Malser Weg (Malzerweg)**, which began around fifteen years ago in the Upper Vinschgau valley. This region is characterized by small-scale agriculture, strong winds, fragmented land ownership, and increasing pressure from monoculture farming and pesticide use.

Concerned about environmental and social changes in the landscape, local residents organized a community referendum on pesticide use. In this vote, 76% of participants opposed the use of pesticides. Following this political success, the movement sought to create lasting, practical change beyond activism. This led to the founding of South Tyrol's first citizen cooperative, structured as a **Cooperativa di Comunità**, a model developed in Italy since

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**Michael Hofer** is an economist and serves on the Board of Directors of **da – the Upper Vinschgau citizens' cooperative**, a non-profit organisation bringing together citizens and entrepreneurs committed to fostering ecological and sustainable economic development in the Upper Vinschgau region.

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The motivation behind **da – cooperative** lies in the common endeavour to shape a sustainable future for the Upper Vinschgau region. Peripheral rural areas are at a disadvantage compared to the centres in today's social development. This is why **da** is taking a different direction. Not to continue developing efficiency, competition and consumption strategies, but to build on resilience, cooperation and diversity.

[da.biz.it](http://da.biz.it)

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the 1970s to support rural and peripheral regions where public services and economic investment are limited.

Today, the cooperative has approximately 250 members, a board and supervisory board, and employs around 18 people. Its membership includes about 40 farmers and producers, as well as butchers, bakeries, and other local businesses. The cooperative's goal is to strengthen the regional economy through sustainable, community-based production and services.

Key activities include food production, marketing, and sales of high-quality local products. The cooperative manages a village dairy, produces meat and other regional foods, and supports members through shared marketing and distribution. Tourism also plays an important role: visitors can enjoy local cuisine, cafés, and accommodation, knowing that their spending directly benefits the region rather than external investors. Cultural activities such as concerts, markets, and public events further strengthen community life and local identity.

One flagship project is the reopening of the village dairy in Prad. Historically, every village in the region had its own dairy, but centralization led to their disappearance, with milk now transported long distances for processing. After a short-lived private attempt to revive the Prad dairy failed, local farmers turned to the cooperative. Through a successful crowdfunding campaign, the dairy was reopened and now produces around 15 varieties of high-quality cheese, restoring local value creation.

Another important initiative focuses on preserving traditional fruit varieties, particularly the Bala pear, an ancient local variety with trees up to 20 meters tall. Only 200–300 of these trees remain. The cooperative now harvests pears across 13 villages, and produces unique products that are unavailable elsewhere. In addition, the cooperative has launched a replanting initiative, committing to plant 100 new pear trees, funded through the sale of regional product boxes.

The cooperative also operates community-based tourism projects, including apartments in Glurns inspired by the

Albergo Diffuso model, which revitalizes unused housing while keeping profits within the region.

Through agriculture, food production, tourism, and cultural initiatives, the Citizen Cooperative of Upper Vinschgau demonstrates how local communities can build sustainable economic structures rooted in regional identity, shared responsibility and long-term stewardship.





## DEALING WITH CONTROVERSIES: A SIMPLE MODEL TO NAVIGATE POLARISATION

In a time when civic space is shrinking and polarisation is intensifying, cultural organisations increasingly find themselves at the centre of public controversy. Creative directors, programme managers and curators are asked to balance artistic freedom, social responsibility, and the expectations of public funders and private partners. In The Hague, Gerrit Jan van 't Veen, Managing Director of Popdistrict Den Haag, presents a practical model for navigating these tensions, one that does not avoid controversy, but treats it as a catalyst for dialogue, trust and institutional resilience.

Popdistrict Den Haag is a formally recognised cultural district in the city centre of The Hague, bringing together a dense network of music venues, bars and public spaces dedicated to live music and cultural programming. What began as a grassroots

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**Gerrit Jan van't Veen** is Managing Director at Popdistrict Den Haag. In The Hague, van't Veen offers a fresh model that strengthens the resilience of cultural institutions. Instead of shying away from controversy, his approach embraces it as an opportunity to build trust, foster dialogue, and sustain partnerships in times of uncertainty.

[popdistrict.nl](http://popdistrict.nl)

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collaboration between two venues – Paard van Troje, a major music venue, and Zwarte Ruit, a bar with live acts – responded to a visible decline in live music across the city. As bars stopped programming concerts, these venues joined forces to foster a vibrant live music ecosystem in the urban core.

Today, the Popdistrict is embedded in municipal cultural policy and encompasses a defined area with multiple venues and public spaces, enabling large-scale festivals and year-round programming. Events such as Sniester, Rewire and Grauzone, activate the district with distinct musical identities and audiences, while also relying on close cooperation between venues, the municipality and funders. More commercial events, from Oktoberfest to Red Bull’s “Rock a Rail,” which famously brought snow to a city square in the Netherlands, coexist alongside experimental and alternative cultural programming.

However, van ’t Veen emphasised that this lively cultural landscape exists within a deeply divided city. The Hague is the most segregated city in the Netherlands: one in

four children is raised in poverty, and there is a stark disparity of up to 12 years in healthy life expectancy between neighbourhoods only a few kilometres apart. At the same time, The Hague is internationally branded as a city of peace and justice, home to global institutions and diplomatic summits.

Public space in the city regularly hosts protests from across the political spectrum, from climate activists blocking highways, to the far-right and extreme-right demonstrations invoking colonial and fascist symbolism. Royal ceremonies, NATO summits and international state visits further amplify the contrasts and tensions embedded in the city's identity. For Popdistrict Den Haag, operating at the heart of this environment means constantly negotiating between celebration, protest, commerce and civic responsibility.

Rather than retreating from these contradictions, van 't Veen proposes embracing them. Popdistrict is now developing a living lab and art programme that explicitly engages with controversy and polarisation. Planned initiatives include

public dialogues on decolonisation, the donut economy, protest culture, food systems, civic participation and sustainability, involving artists, activists, researchers and local communities. The aim is to reimagine what “popular culture” can be: socially engaged, sustainable, and responsive to real societal tensions.

Yet this ambition also raises difficult questions. Popdistrict is publicly funded, operates with municipal permits, and collaborates with commercial venues that depend on profitability. Programming controversial content therefore requires careful consideration, transparency, and accountability. To address this, van ’t Veen introduces a simple but robust decision-making model for dealing with controversial programming.

The model begins by asking whether an event or artist is controversial. If not, the question becomes why the programme is relevant. If it is controversial, the next step is to assess whether it “punches up” or “punches down.” Content that targets marginalised groups is not celebrated or platformed, though it may be addressed

through dialogue or critical discussion. Content that challenges power structures, however, may warrant further consideration.

Additional questions follow: Could the programme break the law? Is there a serious security risk? If legal or safety concerns arise, authorities are informed proactively, and responsibility is shared rather than avoided. Crucially, the model insists on clarity of intention: organisers must be explicit about why something is programmed, beyond artistic appeal alone. Research, stakeholder consultation and proper registration of events are essential.

Van 't Veen also stressed the importance of active involvement during events, reflection afterward, and public documentation of lessons learned. Publishing reflections—especially when things go wrong—helps build institutional memory and supports other cultural organisations facing similar challenges.

The model is intentionally simple, designed to be adaptable and transparent. It will be tested in the coming year as Popdistrict Den Haag continues to navigate polarisation

while remaining an open, vibrant cultural space. van 't Veen concluded by expressing his hope that embracing complexity and controversy can ultimately bring communities closer together, rather than further apart, and that cultural districts can serve as laboratories for democratic resilience.



A summer evening on the Grote Markt © Hugo de Wolf



The "Méga Pic Nic" as seen from the ski, namely the big blanket that was saw by the women from the neighbourhood © Hugo Bougouin

## REACTIVATING SPACES

Future DiverCities – Reimagining culture-led regeneration of urban empty spaces in an ecological way, is an experimental project exploring how vacant or underused urban spaces can be regenerated through artistic practices, participatory approaches and ecological thinking. The project brings together eight pilot sites across Europe, each testing different thematic focuses.

The pilot sites in Marseille and Kuopio focus on commoning practices; sites in Liepāja Berlin and Zagreb explore biodiversity and urban ecology; and pilots in Timișoara, Athens and Florence experiment with impermanence as a strategy for regeneration. In addition, five transversal partners contribute to the project through capacity building, including change-making, urban ecology, communication and training, design thinking, and prospective impact assessment led by academic institutions. At the core of Future DiverCities lies a shared methodology that is simple in

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**Elisabeth Bechara** is a project officer at La Friche la Belle de Mai in Marseille, where she is responsible for the development and coordination of cultural and artistic initiatives.

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**Future DiverCities** explores how culture can drive the ecological regeneration of unused urban spaces. Over four years and eight city pilots, the project has tested new forms of cultural and civic engagement. This session shares key methods, challenges, and learnings from this collective experiment in sustainable urban transformation.

[future-divercities.eu](http://future-divercities.eu)

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principle, yet complex in practice: to reimagine culture-led regeneration of empty urban spaces through artistic, participatory and ecological processes.

The first step is identifying a space. This involves questioning what constitutes an “urban space,” what “empty” truly means, and who owns or uses the site. In many cases, this phase required significant time and negotiation, depending on local contexts and governance structures.

Equally important is building a local coalition. Communities are central to the project’s success, and participation is understood broadly: it includes residents, local authorities, cultural actors and non-human users such as plants, animals, and ecosystems. Coalition-building is a long-term and fluid process that evolves throughout the project, and is essential for building trust and collective ownership.

Once a space and coalition are identified, a needs assessment is conducted to understand both what people wish to see in the space and what the space itself requires. This phase relies on listening,

transparency, and honesty about what the project can and cannot deliver. Cultural workers play a key role by providing tools and methods that help communities articulate needs that are not always easy to express.

The next step involves engaging creative workers and artists through open calls with clear ethical and methodological criteria. Artists are invited to work within a bottom-up framework, shifting from autonomous creation toward co-design processes that respond to local needs and reimagine urban regeneration beyond traditional planning approaches.

Designing together requires time, patience and continuous reassessment. It often involves stepping back, adapting plans and accepting uncertainty. Over three years of on-site experimentation, Future DiverCities has treated impact assessment not as a final outcome, but as an ongoing process embedded at every stage of implementation.

Impact evaluation addresses social, environmental and cultural dimensions: the

effects on neighbours, daily users of the space, nearby schools and local biodiversity. The project does not aim exclusively for positive outcomes, but rather for honest reflection on what worked, what did not, and what should be done differently in the future. As an experimental project, its primary objective is learning and knowledge-sharing rather than seeking results.

A central lesson from Future DiverCities is the crucial role of capacity building. Webinars, training sessions, podcasts and peer exchanges on social change, urban ecology, design thinking, and governance have been fundamental in supporting cultural workers to adapt their practices. Capacity building has proven not to be a secondary activity, but a structural pillar of the project, strengthening both individual actors and broader professional networks.

From the experience of Future DiverCities, several fundamental lessons emerged. Participatory, culture-led regeneration requires time: meaningful processes of engagement, trust-building and adaptation cannot be compressed into short funding

cycles without compromising quality and relevance. The project also revealed that “empty” urban spaces are rarely unused; they often host informal social practices, everyday routines, and forms of biodiversity that must be carefully observed and respected. For this reason, regeneration does not always require large-scale interventions, sometimes small, sensitive actions are sufficient to enhance livability without disrupting existing uses.

Central to successful co-design is trust. Community members contribute their time and energy voluntarily, and their willingness to engage depends on confidence in the project’s intentions, transparency and long-term commitment. Strong local engagement, while not guaranteeing financial sustainability, creates social ownership and a sense of shared responsibility that supports the longevity of spaces and initiatives. Continuous evaluation and experimentation proved equally essential: regularly reassessing methods, questioning assumptions and embracing uncertainty allowed the project to remain responsive and adaptive throughout its implementation.

Ultimately, the project demonstrated that cultural and environmental practices are inseparably linked. Artistic processes can meaningfully integrate ecological thinking and biodiversity concerns, positioning cultural workers as facilitators of social and environmental transformation rather than mere producers of cultural outputs. In this sense, culture becomes a powerful vehicle for embedding sustainable practices and fostering new ways of shaping urban life.





## VIENNA CLUB COMMISSION

Free Spaces emerged from Vienna's vibrant club culture and from a broader political ambition to position the city as one of Europe's most youth-friendly urban environments. Strategic frameworks such as Vienna's Urban Development Plan and the UN Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the importance of temporary outdoor spaces, non-commercial public areas and participatory, environmentally responsible urban culture. Despite this, the administrative and legal conditions for organizing open-air cultural events remained highly complex and difficult to navigate, particularly for grassroots collectives.

Before the Free Spaces project, many collectives relied on a legal loophole: organizing raves as political demonstrations under Austria's constitutional right to assembly. While this approach allowed for spontaneity, minimal bureaucracy and low financial risk, it also created significant

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**David Prieth** is part of the team at the Vienna Club Commission (VCC) and works as a cultural worker based between Innsbruck and Vienna, two Austrian cities with very different scales, needs, and cultural infrastructures. With a background in DIY and grassroots cultural work, he brings both practical and institutional perspectives to his role. Since 2024, he has been working at the Vienna Club Commission, where he focuses on consulting clubs, venues, and open-air events. As part of the team at the Vienna Club Commission (VCC) he coordinates the project Free Spaces, an initiative aimed at creating accessible, low-barrier cultural events in public space.

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**The Vienna Club Commission (VCC)** is a platform funded by the City of Vienna that supports and represents the city's club and event culture. It provides advice, networking, and knowledge resources for club operators, promoters, and cultural organizers, while acting as an intermediary between the scene, city administration, and politics. The VCC works to strengthen the social, cultural, and economic role of clubs and nightlife in Vienna.

[viennaclubcommission.at](http://viennaclubcommission.at)

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challenges. These events operated in a legal grey zone, often led to conflicts with authorities, lacked safety mechanisms such as audience capacity control, and were not designed for cultural events. Both organizers and institutions recognized the need for a new framework that could preserve the DIY ethos of club culture while offering legal clarity and institutional support.

In response, the Vienna Club Commission facilitated a series of focus groups and consultations with collectives, cultural workers and city representatives. The result was the Free Spaces project: a legally defined, publicly accessible space for non-commercial, DIY-organized open-air events. The initiative is located on Vienna's Danube Island, a central yet non-residential area already informally used for cultural gatherings.

The project provides a clear legal framework while maintaining free admission and a non-commercial character. Events are funded by the City of Vienna with a fixed budget of €4,000 per event, covering essential infrastructure such as power

supply, toilets and basic technical needs. Due to environmental restrictions on the Danube Island, such as the prohibition of generators, all power must be supplied by batteries, which are also financed through the project.

While the funding does not allow for profit, it significantly reduces financial risk and enables fair compensation in line with national fair-pay guidelines.

The Vienna Club Commission acts as an intermediary between collectives and municipal authorities, handling permits, negotiations and logistical coordination. This allows organizers to focus on content, programming, and community-building, rather than administrative barriers.

Since its launch in 2023, the project has gradually expanded: audience capacity has increased from 450 to 800 people, event durations have been extended, and operational conditions have improved.

Free Spaces operates under a set of clearly defined rules, such as fixed event times, free admission, environmental standards and spatial guidelines, but within these

boundaries, collectives retain creative autonomy. The project does not aim to replace illegal raves or underground culture, which remain an important part of the scene, but rather to offer an additional, legitimate option for cultural expression in public space.

Beyond logistics, Free Spaces is understood as a cultural and social platform. Particular emphasis is placed on inclusion, enabling marginalized groups and underrepresented collectives, such as queer and BIPOC communities, to access public space and visibility. The Vienna Club Commission also fosters exchange between collectives by encouraging resource-sharing, maintaining communication channels and supporting peer networks.

As the project grows, governance structures are evolving. Due to increasing demand, the next development step is the establishment of an independent jury composed of representatives from the city administration, the Vienna Club Commission, clubs and the wider cultural scene, ensuring transparency and fairness in the selection process.

Reflecting on the project, Free Spaces demonstrates how cultural self-organization and municipal governance can coexist and meet halfway. While it cannot replicate the complete freedom of informal or illegal events, it serves as a living laboratory for civic responsibility, cultural participation, and new models of cooperation between institutions and grassroots initiatives. In recognizing club culture as a site of collective agency, the project strengthens urban democracy from the ground up.



## STELVIO – A NARRATIVE OF RESILIENCE

Stelvio (Stilfs) is a small Alpine village located at 1,300 meters above sea level in the Upper Vinschgau valley, within the Stelvio National Park. The village has approximately 400 inhabitants, while the wider municipality counts around 1,200 residents. Characterized by a compact historic core and later expansions from the 1970s onward, Stelvio's narrow spatial structure preserves architectural integrity but also presents challenges in terms of mobility and accessibility. The local economy is shaped by tourism, agriculture, services and small-scale industry, although many residents commute to work outside the village.

Like many rural communities, Stelvio faces significant challenges: demographic aging, population decline, vacant houses, and the gradual loss of local services. Today, only one grocery store remains, operating on

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limited hours. At the same time, the village displays a strong sense of proximity and social cohesion. While parts of the community are open to experimentation and innovation, others remain cautious and conservative, reflecting a common tension in peripheral rural areas. Designing inclusive formats that reach a meaningful share of a small population remains a central challenge.

In response, the municipality of Stelvio applied for and was selected as one of 21 national pilot sites – one per Italian region and autonomous province – under a funding program dedicated to cultural-led local development. Between 2022 and 2025, the project mobilizes approximately €20 million to foster economic, social and cultural renewal. While the scale of funding initially raised concerns, the project has demonstrated that such investment is necessary to address structural challenges such as infrastructure renewal, climate adaptation and long-term resilience in small rural communities.

The project's core approach is to stimulate socio-ecological transformation through

culture. Culture is not understood as isolated artistic programming, but as the village's living "DNA": its habits, practices, values, skills and relationships. The aim is to support a deep, systemic transformation of mindsets and shared values, thereby strengthening the community's capacity to face future challenges. Resilience, in this sense, refers to the ability of the village and its inhabitants to adapt, regenerate, and remain socially and economically viable over time.

To achieve this, the project invests across five interconnected fields: housing and infrastructure; culture and community; agriculture and landscape; crafts; and tourism. These priorities emerged from an extensive dialogue with residents, focusing on everyday needs and locally perceived challenges. The project comprises more than 25 measures, combining material and immaterial investments that are implemented in parallel.

On the immaterial side, initiatives include the development of a shared narrative and identity for Stelvio. Not as a tourism brand, but as a platform for internal

communication, collective reflection, and community-building. Cultural programming encompasses an annual festival, workshops, educational activities and an Arts and Crafts Residency, designed to support knowledge transfer between generations and strengthen traditional and contemporary practices. Agricultural measures focus on developing local products in collaboration with farmers, creating new economic perspectives rooted in the landscape.

Material investments provide the physical foundation for this transformation. These include the construction of ten rental apartments, the development of a multifunctional community building housing a grocery store, library and service spaces, the conversion of historic barns into a co-working space and a craft studio, and the requalification of village fountain squares as social meeting points. Additional measures address mobility, reforestation, irrigation and climate adaptation, reflecting the project's integrated understanding of cultural change.

Participation is a central pillar of the project, supported by continuous communication and a wide range of participatory formats. Cultural events, workshops and festivals serve as spaces for exchange, collective learning and intergenerational dialogue. Special attention is given to children and young people, recognizing their role in shaping long-term visions for the village.

As the project enters its final phase, the question of continuity has become increasingly important. Ensuring that successful initiatives persist beyond the funding period requires both active people and enabling spaces, not only physical infrastructure, but also social and institutional frameworks that allow ideas and collaborations to grow. In this context, the possibility of establishing a citizen cooperative, inspired by similar models in the region, is currently being explored.

The project was initiated by the municipality and developed in close collaboration with residents. Daria Habicher joined the process through a competitive selection to support implementation, working alongside a local colleague. This combination of local

knowledge and external perspective has proven essential for building trust, navigating community dynamics, and maintaining critical distance. The project's geographic focus is limited to the village of Stelvio, in line with national funding priorities for small rural settlements, but efforts are made to involve surrounding villages and regional partners whenever possible.

Today, the project is supported by a broad network of approximately 40 partners, including cultural institutions, agricultural actors, tourism associations, financial institutions and regional and international collaborators. Together, they contribute to positioning Stelvio not as a finished model, but as an ongoing experiment in rural resilience, rooted in place, driven by community, and shaped through culture.





## AMBASSADORS OF GOOD PRACTICE IN NON-URBAN AREAS

The Ambassadors of Good Practice in Non-Urban Areas is a programme developed within the Creative FLIP project, specifically supporting artists and cultural practitioners living and working in rural contexts. For the first time within Creative FLIP, this phase of the project focused exclusively on non-urban areas, aiming to empower cultural actors and local communities to drive regeneration through arts and culture.

The programme is guided by a central question: how can arts and cultural initiatives contribute to sustainable regeneration in rural areas? In response, it was designed to identify, support, and share successful cultural practices that could be adapted and transferred to different local contexts. Two open calls were launched: one selecting ten host organisations and another selecting ten visiting practitioners from diverse backgrounds across Europe.

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**Charlotte Jerie** is the Project Manager of Creative FLIP. Previously, she worked on the EU project Voices of Culture, facilitating structured dialogues between the European Commission and cultural organisations.

**Christina Kamperi** is the Project Officer of Creative FLIP. Before joining the programme, she worked in the Cultural Relations Platform, where she supported the implementation of cultural exchanges and capacity building in an international context.

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**Ambassadors of Good Practice** is a peer-learning programme that brings together host organisations and visiting stakeholders to share exemplary practices in revitalising non-urban and peripheral regions. Together, they explore, co-create, and exchange ideas to harness culture for regeneration, inclusion and sustainable development.

[creativeflip.creativehubs.net](http://creativeflip.creativehubs.net)

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The high number and quality of applications led to a rigorous selection process and resulted in broad geographic and thematic diversity among participants.

The selected organisations span multiple countries, including the Baltic states, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Spain and Portugal, representing a wide range of approaches. These include art- and technology-oriented farms, local museums and cultural organisations preserving tangible and intangible heritage, and co-living or community-based initiatives aimed at revitalising rural villages. The programme runs until March 2026, with several exchanges already successfully completed.

One early exchange was hosted by Sende, a co-living space from the Northern Spain region of Galicia, which welcomed Schule, a cultural centre from rural Czech Republic. Rather than following a strictly one-to-one professional exchange model, the programme focused on deep immersion. The visiting participant was fully integrated into Sende's daily activities, from co-living management to community engagement, participating in discussions, shared meals

and local initiatives. This approach fostered a strong sense of belonging and facilitated experiential learning rooted in everyday practice.

Another exchange took place between Spazio Nour and Nástupište 1–12. Spazio Nour, originally founded in Italy and now based in Belgium, hosted the visiting organisation at a renovated castle in Flanders during its community-focused festival The Ground We Share. The festival included workshops, performances, and exhibitions designed to actively involve local residents. The visiting organisation from Slovakia, a multimedia space for contemporary culture, engaged directly with these activities to explore how similar participatory formats could be adapted for their own rural context.

These examples demonstrate that mobility and exchange in rural areas can be both meaningful and accessible. They show how artistic exchanges generate inspiration, foster community engagement, and support experimentation across different territorial contexts. In this sense, the programme complements initiatives such as Culture

Moves Europe, encouraging artists and cultural practitioners to pursue international mobility opportunities.

The Ambassadors of Good Practice programme serves a dual purpose. Alongside facilitating peer learning and exchange, it helps identify and document exemplary cultural practices. These case studies are shared with practitioners and policymakers to raise awareness of innovative cultural initiatives and highlight the importance of sustained public investment in arts and culture.

In a rapidly changing environment marked by social, economic, and ecological challenges, the programme strengthens the resilience of cultural actors by connecting them, amplifying their practices, and informing policy development at the European level.



A friendly gathering outside of Spazio Nour © Spazio Nour



Brainstorming about recovery, resilience and resistance © Samira Mosca

## AUF GUTE NACHBARSCHAFT!\*

The breakout sessions of the Hubs Meetup explored the spirit behind the expression “Auf gute Nachbarschaft!” (To a good neighborhood), a call for mutual support, solidarity, and collective care within communities. Drawing on diverse case studies from across the European Creative Hubs Network, participants reflected on how creative hubs navigate crises, foster collaboration, and build sustainable futures together. A clear message emerged: creative hubs thrive not as isolated organizations, but as interconnected communities grounded in trust, shared learning and mutual aid.

Discussions questioned the crisis-driven framing of resistance, recovery, and resilience, proposing a more positive interpretation. Recovery becomes continuity rather than repair when empathy and collaboration are present from the outset, while proactive anticipation of challenges can reduce conflict and competition.

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\* **“Auf gute**

**Nachbarschaft”** is a local expression to signal mutual help to the neighbourhood, to help and support each other. In the scope of this Hubs Meetup topic, this session highlights the case studies of the ECHN members, using the individual stories to inspire each other and reminding ourselves of the importance of our neighbours and communities.

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The meet-up featured a series of breakout sessions, where participants were divided into smaller groups, each guided by a facilitator. These sessions created a more intimate setting that encouraged open dialogue, peer exchange, and the sharing of experiences among participants.

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Innovation often emerges in the “grey zones” between formal structures, where flexibility and artistic thinking allow new solutions to surface. Pandemic experiences illustrated this vividly: hubs moved activities online, collaborated across institutions, and transformed cancelled events into widely distributed digital programs, reaching even broader audiences.

Community emerged as both a safety net and catalyst. Collaboration often replaced competition, especially when funding was scarce, and joint mapping of resources and shared funding strategies helped hubs survive severe cuts. Member loyalty, such as continued support for co-working spaces during lockdowns, reinforced the depth of collective commitment. This highlighted a new perspective: hubs are not merely recovering from crises, but learning to operate within ongoing uncertainty through solidarity rather than constant reaction.

Recovery was also framed not as returning to unsustainable models, but as building new, collaborative cultural ecosystems. This includes addressing precarious artistic labor, advocating fair compensation, defending ethical standards and

experimenting with initiatives that support well-being, care, and burnout prevention. Open-access platforms and community-driven programs emerged as ways to strengthen inclusivity and sustainability.

The value of “failing together” is emphasized, creating spaces to share unsuccessful projects and reflect collectively on practical and emotional lessons, transforming isolation into shared learning that strengthens both mental well-being and strategic effectiveness. Crises, particularly COVID-19, were described as catalysts for innovation: hubs diversified funding sources and partnerships, expanded digital programming to reach international audiences, explored temporary or pop-up spaces to maintain visibility and experimented with new governance models, including cooperative ownership. Leadership was understood less as hierarchical control and more as facilitating collective ownership while recognizing community strengths.

Resilience encompasses both organizational and human dimensions. Structurally, it relies on documenting

knowledge, diversifying funding, establishing long-term partnerships, and using flexible strategies guided by shared values. Human resilience depends on maintaining work life balance, fostering informal care and peer support, and recognizing that emotional sustainability underpins organizational sustainability. Resistance was reframed as the protection of inclusive community spaces through clear norms, accessible programs, and the building of bridges between grassroots groups, institutions and international networks. This patient, everyday work of inclusion was seen as essential cultural resistance.

The sessions underscored that investing in community is crucial, collaboration outweighs competition, crises can become opportunities for reinvention, and successes and failures should be shared openly. Flexible structures guided by strong values, care for people as much as projects, and maintaining connections are central to resilience. Creative communities across Europe continue to transform challenges into opportunities for collective growth and cultural innovation.



## HANDS ON WORKSHOPPING – RECOVERY

As part of the BauTopia 6 conference program, the Hubs Meetup also included a series of three different workshops. These activities offered participants the opportunity to engage more actively with the conference themes through hands-on formats, collective reflection, and informal exchange.

The thematic focus of the Hands-on Workshopping – Recovery series centered on regeneration as an active, collective, and embodied practice. Across three workshops, recovery was explored not as passive rest, but as a multidimensional process, political, personal, communal, and ecological, rooted in making, reflection, and reconnection. Through hands-on creation and shared experiences, participants engaged with recovery as a way of sustaining energy, strengthening communities, and fostering long-term creative resilience.



Analogue Printing Workshop for Activists by Altomare

## PRINTING ACTIVISM



How analogue printing can become a tool for political expression was explored in this workshop through hands-on experimentation and collaborative creation of materials for creative activism. A variety of printing and design methods were tested to make political messages visible. Using manual printing techniques and the RISO MZ770, participants produced both individual and collective works intended to have an impact in public spaces.

**Altomare** is a creative studio focusing on experimental, analog, and RISO printing for artistic and political expression, alongside services like, catalogs, and web development. They specialize in hands-on workshops, manual techniques, and collaborative, interdisciplinary projects.



An exploration of regenerative practices inspired by  
sourdough bread baking with Forno Vagabondo


# FERMENTING RECOVERY





Working in creative initiatives can be rewarding yet demanding. Without recovery practices, we risk burnout and disconnection. What supports wellbeing in creative hubs? What can sourdough teach us about sustainable engagement? Participants explored recovery through the metaphor and practice of sourdough baking.

Forno Vagabondo is a mobile social oven on wheels that combines wild fermentation and environmental workshops to foster community economies and eco-social justice. Traveling through the Vallagarina Valley on an electric cargo bike, it creates encounters between people and more-than-human worlds in public space. Through collective sourdough bread-making, it makes ecological interconnections tangible and invites participants to “knead” more desirable futures together.

A group of people is walking along a historic street in the Vinschgau Valley. The street is paved and lined with traditional stone and wood buildings. In the foreground, two men are walking towards the camera. The man on the left is wearing a light blue short-sleeved button-down shirt, dark pants, and a black cap. He is carrying a dark jacket and a blue bag. The man on the right is wearing a light grey t-shirt, dark pants, and sunglasses. He is carrying a green jacket and a white cup. Behind them, a group of people is walking in the same direction. The background shows a stone wall and a wooden building with a corrugated metal roof. The overall atmosphere is warm and scenic.

Participants flowed and recovered in nature along the historic Waalwege. During a guided Waalweg Panorama Tour, they discovered the ancient cultivation terraces of the Schlanders Sonnenberg. The Waalwege, historic, traditional irrigation channels originating in the Vinschgau Valley and recognized as part of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, offered both cultural insight and a unique landscape experience.

BASIS founder and Chief Visionary Officer Hannes was born and raised at Silandro. Hannes knows the area like the back of his hand and had many stories and anecdotes to share.

Energizing Panoramic Nature Path with Hannes Götsch

**WATERFLOW**





Schulhofweg  
Schlipf

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BAUTOPIA is the identity of ECHN's annual events and a concept rooted in placemaking, combining the German word bau (making) with topia, derived from the Greek word topos (place). BAUTOPIA brings members together to collectively shape the spaces, practices and priorities that define the creative hubs ecosystem, through exchange, reflection and co-creation.

[bautopia.creativehubs.net](http://bautopia.creativehubs.net)

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