

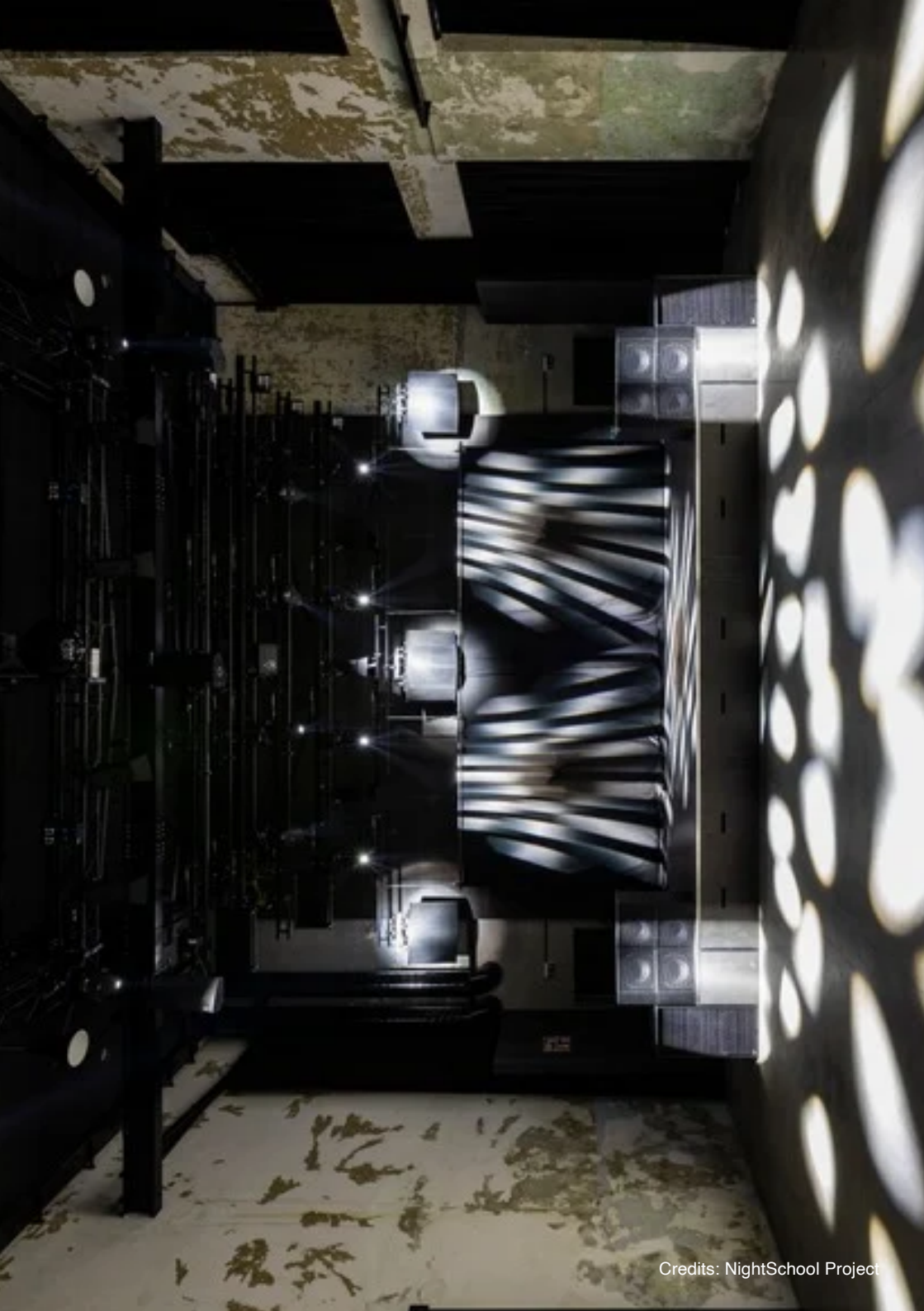
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META MORPH OSIS



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META MORPH OSIS

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METAMORPHOSIS

Metamorphosis is a condition of change, of moving between states, of embracing uncertainty as the seedbed of renewal. It is not simply a transformation but a process of becoming, a continuous reconfiguration that challenges fixed forms and creates the possibility of new identities, practices, and imaginaries. Within the cultural and creative sectors, metamorphosis describes the

fragile yet generative dynamics that unfold when institutions, communities, and individuals face disruption and choose to reinvent themselves rather than remain bound by inertia.

The texts presented in this book are the direct outcome of the Hubs Meetup conference that took place in Malmo in June 2024 that took metamorphosis as both theme and method. They were conceived in the dialogue and exchanges of the gathering, but they extend far beyond it, forming a constellation of perspectives that carry the conference into an ongoing conversation. What you will encounter here are not static reports or summaries, but living texts: each one captures the momentum of debate and reflection, and each continues to evolve in relation to the questions posed during and after the event. The opening contribution, “Cross Innovation in Southern Sweden” by Jenny Kornmacher, situates the question of metamorphosis within regional dynamics. It explores how cultural and creative ecosystems can serve as engines of cross-sectoral innovation, highlighting the ways in which collaboration between the arts,

business, and policy can generate new pathways for resilience and growth. The second text, “Night School: Sustainability & Night Culture” by Tiago Prater and Anna Hilber, turns toward the nocturnal city as a space of experimentation. It examines how night-time economies and cultures can embrace principles of sustainability while maintaining their vibrancy, proposing models where cultural nightlife becomes a laboratory for greener, more inclusive futures. This contribution also stems from a broader European project of high interest to the creative hubs ecosystem. By following its detailed presentation, readers gain deeper insight into how cultural hubs can engage with sustainability, resilience, and cultural policy in relation to nightlife. In “Social Impact Canvas for Creative Changemakers” by Pille Pruulmann Vengerfeldt, the focus shifts to tools of agency and measurement. Here metamorphosis is approached as a practice of accountability and empowerment: the canvas offers a framework for cultural and creative actors to articulate, track, and strengthen their social impact, thereby

transforming abstract ideals into actionable strategies.

The next contribution, “Future DiverCities: Reimagining Urban Emptiness Through Culture and Ecology at La Friche” by Elisabeth Bechara, reflects on how disused urban spaces can be reimagined as sites of cultural and ecological renewal. Drawing on the example of La Friche, it demonstrates how emptiness itself can be fertile ground for experimentation, where artistic practice and ecological thinking converge to reconfigure the city. This essay emerges from another European project of great relevance to ECHN members, offering an in-depth perspective on how creative hubs can catalyze transformation in the urban fabric.

In “Noise Zones: Defending the Right to Be Loud” by Nicklas Johanson, metamorphosis takes on a political dimension. The essay argues for the cultural and social necessity of noise, framing it as a right that must be defended in increasingly regulated and privatized urban environments. Here, sound becomes both a form of resistance and a means of reasserting the presence of communities in public space.

Finally, “Rebuilding to Last: Rethinking Cultural Spaces for People and Planet”, by Tiffany Fukuma, considers the material and architectural dimensions of transformation. It calls for cultural spaces that are not only socially inclusive but also ecologically sustainable, proposing new models of design and governance that ensure cultural infrastructures remain adaptable and future-proof. Like some of the other contributions, this text is rooted in a European project of direct importance to the creative hubs ecosystem. Through its presentation, readers can better understand the challenges and opportunities of building cultural infrastructures that resonate deeply with the needs of hubs across Europe. Together, these texts form a polyphonic narrative of metamorphosis. They invite readers to think of transformation not as an endpoint, but as an open process that continually reshapes both the cultural field and the societies it touches.

CROSS INNOVATION IN SOUTHERN SWEDEN

RETHINKING INNOVATION FOR A COMPLEX ERA

Innovation has long been celebrated as the engine of modern societies, a driving force of economic growth and social development. For decades, the word itself has been associated almost exclusively with technological breakthroughs, scientific discoveries, or entrepreneurial daring. These remain important dimensions of progress, but they no longer capture the full picture of what innovation means in a complex and interconnected world. We now inhabit a historical moment defined by unprecedented challenges. Climate change threatens the foundations of our

Cross Innovation in Southern Sweden (2023–2026) is a three-year regional innovation initiative (April 2023–March 2026) funded by Region Skåne and Region Blekinge with support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This collaboration is spearheaded by the regional culture departments of Skåne and Blekinge alongside NetPort Science Park (owned by Karlshamn Municipality). The project engages a diverse consortium of regional actors—including municipal partners such as Tomelilla, Malmö, Karlshamn, and Helsingborg—along with small and medium-sized enterprises and the cultural and creative sectors.

ecosystems, reshaping entire economies and forcing us to question our consumption patterns. Digital transformation is progressing at a pace that overwhelms legal frameworks and cultural adaptation, producing both extraordinary opportunities and deep ethical dilemmas. Demographic shifts, political polarisation, and migration flows reshape communities and identities, calling for new ways of imagining togetherness. These challenges cannot be reduced to a single discipline or solved by isolated actors. They demand a rethinking of innovation itself.

It is against this background that the idea of cross innovation emerges as a compelling approach. Cross innovation does not reject the technological or entrepreneurial tradition of innovation, but it widens the lens. It acknowledges that some of the most transformative solutions emerge when sectors, disciplines, and perspectives intersect. A new product or process can arise not from the genius of a single actor but from the creative collision between a designer and a scientist, an artist and an engineer, a cultural producer and a policy-maker.

The project Cross Innovation in Southern Sweden (2023–2026) is grounded in this philosophy. It seeks to build structures of collaboration across cultural, economic, and institutional boundaries, while demonstrating the unique and irreplaceable role of the cultural and creative sector in shaping resilient futures. It is an invitation to unlearn, to relearn, and to establish ways of working together that go beyond rhetorical declarations of partnership and reach into genuine co-creation. The project was presented by Jenny Kornmacher, Cultural Strategist, who gave an inspirational speech underlining how cross innovation can help societies rethink innovation for a complex era.

INNOVATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY

One of the defining features of contemporary innovation systems is their tendency towards fragmentation. Businesses, universities, cultural institutions, and public authorities often operate in parallel. Each follows its own priorities, works with its own language, and measures success through its own

indicators. In such an environment, collaboration is frequently celebrated in principle but seldom achieved in practice. Yet the problems that societies face today are of such magnitude and complexity that no single actor can reasonably claim to address them alone. Climate change is not only an environmental problem; it also reconfigures economic systems, challenges cultural practices, and reshapes political landscapes. Digitalisation is not only about technological infrastructure; it requires us to grapple with questions of trust, privacy, and human behaviour. Migration is not only a matter of borders or labour markets; it is also about cultural belonging, education, and social cohesion.

Cross innovation responds to this fragmentation by demanding a deeper form of collaboration. This collaboration is not the shallow type often invoked in strategies and reports, where “working together” means little more than information exchange. It requires the humility to admit that no single perspective holds the truth, the courage to share ownership of problems, and the openness to outcomes that cannot be predicted in advance. Collaboration in this sense is not comfortable. It asks

participants to unlearn their habits of control, to suspend assumptions, and to rediscover the art of listening. But it is precisely in this discomfort that new possibilities emerge.

THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR AS A CATALYST

The cultural and creative sector has a central role to play in this new paradigm of innovation. For many years, the sector has been marginalised in economic debates, considered primarily as a provider of entertainment or as a driver of tourism. While such contributions are significant, they vastly underestimate the true potential of cultural and creative practices.

The sector encompasses a vast range of disciplines (performing arts, fashion, film, literature, music, fine arts, and photography) each of which develops particular ways of imagining, experimenting, and engaging with the world. What unites them is not a specific output but a particular capacity: the ability to make the invisible visible, to turn abstract questions into tangible experiences, to reframe problems in ways that touch both reason and emotion.

Creative professionals are accustomed to navigating ambiguity. Where engineers and managers often seek clarity and predictability, artists and designers are trained to inhabit uncertainty, to experiment with form, and to embrace failure as a path to discovery. They are also natural storytellers, able to craft narratives that mobilise collective imagination and connect with the deepest layers of human meaning. When these capacities are integrated into cross-sectoral collaborations, they do more than add an aesthetic touch. They transform the process itself. A technological innovation becomes not just feasible but desirable. A business model becomes not just efficient but meaningful. A social policy becomes not just functional but inspiring. In this sense, the cultural and creative sector operates as a catalyst: it accelerates processes of innovation by infusing them with imagination, resilience, and humanity.

PROCESSES OF CROSS INNOVATION

Cross innovation does not happen by chance. It requires carefully designed processes that bring together actors who might otherwise never meet, and that

provide them with structures for genuine collaboration.

In Southern Sweden, such processes unfold in stages. They often begin with preparatory meetings between companies and creators, where mutual expectations are clarified and challenges are mapped. These conversations are not just technical; they are about building trust and cultivating curiosity. From there, the process moves into workshop settings. The first workshop day is typically dedicated to ideation and the selection of ideas. This is a moment of creative collision, where participants are invited to move beyond the familiar and to test surprising combinations of perspectives.

Between workshops, further research and meetings with creators deepen the insights and ensure that ideas are not detached from reality. A second workshop day focuses on concept development, translating promising ideas into more concrete forms that can be assessed and potentially implemented. The process does not end here. Evaluation and implementation are integral, ensuring that outcomes are not left as prototypes but can evolve into sustainable solutions.

What emerges is a rhythm of interaction that combines spontaneity with structure. On the one hand, participants are free to experiment, to imagine boldly, and to engage in playful creativity. On the other, they are supported by a framework that ensures ideas are refined, evaluated, and anchored in practical contexts.

METHODS, TOOLS, AND STRUCTURES

The Southern Sweden project makes use of a wide variety of methods and tools, many of which are drawn from fields such as design thinking, participatory innovation, and co-creation practices. Workshops are not conceived as one-off events but as spaces of continuous learning. Prototyping is used not simply as a technical exercise but as a way of making ideas tangible and negotiable. Storytelling methods allow participants to articulate visions that resonate emotionally and strategically. Reflective evaluation ensures that every stage of the process becomes an opportunity to learn and adapt. But the real strength of the initiative lies less in any individual tool than in the structures that support them. Without such structures,

collaboration risks remaining superficial. Too often, organisations experiment with innovation workshops that generate enthusiasm in the moment but dissolve into nothingness once participants return to their routines. What distinguishes cross innovation is the commitment to continuity. Structures are designed to ensure that trust built in one workshop is not lost but becomes the foundation for long-term relationships. Structures also help bridge cultural differences between sectors, providing a common space where diverse logics can interact productively.

LEARNING AS THE CORE OUTCOME

The most valuable outcome of cross innovation is not always the immediate solution to a specific challenge. More often, it is the learning that participants acquire through the process. They learn new ways of thinking, new languages, and new strategies for problem-solving. They discover not only insights about the problem at hand but also about their own habits, assumptions, and blind spots. This learning accumulates over time. Each cross innovation process expands the

network of trust, strengthens the bonds between sectors, and plants seeds for future collaborations. Over time, these seeds grow into an ecosystem where knowledge flows across boundaries and where resilience is built not on homogeneity but on diversity. In a world where uncertainty is the norm, this capacity to learn collectively may be the most important innovation of all.

TESTIMONIES FROM PRACTICE

The significance of these processes is often best conveyed in the words of those who have participated in them. A business leader described the experience by saying, “I see a profit I don’t usually see.” This statement reflects an encounter with forms of value that go beyond conventional financial indicators, encompassing new ideas, unexpected collaborations, and insights that cannot be measured on a balance sheet.

Another participant, an art gallery director, expressed surprise at how quickly progress and solutions emerged. He noted that what had been achieved in just a few days would, in other contexts, require hundreds of hours

of consultancy work, often without comparable results. His reflection points to the unique efficiency of cross innovation processes, which bypass the inertia of bureaucratic procedures and unlock the power of creativity.

A third participant described the experience simply as “two fantastic and extremely valuable days.” The brevity of the statement underscores its sincerity. For those involved, the value of cross innovation lies not only in the outcomes but in the lived experience of collaboration, discovery, and shared achievement.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RELEVANCE

The lessons from Southern Sweden are relevant well beyond the region itself. Across Europe and globally, societies are searching for ways to revitalise their economies, foster sustainability, and strengthen social cohesion. Cross innovation offers a model that speaks directly to these needs.

For policymakers, the project demonstrates that the cultural and creative sector is not a marginal luxury but a strategic necessity. By

involving artists and creative professionals in innovation processes, public authorities can foster solutions that are not only technically feasible but also socially meaningful and culturally resonant. This aligns with European priorities on the green transition, where cultural practices can shift mindsets towards sustainable living, and on the digital transition, where creative industries can humanise technology and build trust in digital systems.

LOOKING FORWARD: TOWARDS RESILIENT FUTURES

As the project continues, its broader significance becomes clear. Cross innovation is not simply an experimental method but a long-term strategy for building resilient societies. It creates ecosystems that are adaptive, imaginative, and able to withstand shocks. It prepares communities not only to respond to crises but to anticipate opportunities.

The future will demand new technologies, but it will also demand new ways of living together. Cross innovation offers precisely this: a framework where diversity becomes strength, where creativity becomes strategy,

and where collaboration becomes the norm rather than the exception.

In this sense, the Southern Sweden initiative is more than a regional project. It is a glimpse of what innovation might look like in the twenty-first century: open, collaborative, and deeply human.

CONCLUSION

Cross innovation teaches us that the essence of innovation is not novelty for its own sake. It is the creation of meaning through collaboration. By embracing imagination, diversity, and co-creation, Southern Sweden has pioneered a model that speaks to the challenges and opportunities of our age.

As one participant remarked, “I see a profit I don’t usually see.” That profit is not confined to financial gain. It includes social trust, cultural enrichment, and human learning. And in a world facing multiple crises, these may be the most valuable profits of all.



NIGHT SCHOOL: SUSTAINABILITY & NIGHT CULTURE

Nightlife constitutes an essential dimension of cultural life in Europe. Far from being only entertainment, it is a site of experimentation, social connection, and urban regeneration. Clubs, festivals, and informal gatherings provide spaces for

young people to acquire skills, communities to assert identities, and cities to reinvent themselves. Yet, despite its contributions, night culture has long been stigmatized as a site of disorder, linked to criminality or drug use, and therefore excluded from cultural policy frameworks. It often survives on precarious labour, unstable funding, and ad hoc organisational models. The Night School project, funded by Creative Europe, emerged as a response to these structural challenges by creating the first transnational education and mentorship programme dedicated to night culture producers at the early stages of their careers.

The rationale for Night School stemmed from two persistent issues: the absence of structured training pathways and the lack of policy recognition. No formal curriculum exists for becoming a night culture producer, and practitioners are left to learn through trial, error, and precarious self-organisation. At the same time, the absence of dedicated policies leaves the sector underfunded and vulnerable to political neglect. This became particularly visible in cities such as Malmö, where informal *svartklubbar* (black clubs) occupied

NightSchool is a Europe-wide training and micro-funding programme (2023–ongoing), supported by the European Union’s Creative Europe programme.

Organized by VibeLab, the initiative is co-created with four key partners: FUSE (Belgium), Kanepes Kultūras Centrs (Latvia), BASIS Vinschgau Venost (Italy, including KASINO Club), and Transversal Project (Sweden). Rooted in the pillars of Social Awareness, Sustainability, and Entrepreneurship, NightSchool supports participants in developing and implementing sustainability-focused nightlife ideas, while building an online hybrid learning platform curated by leading night-culture and sustainability experts.

abandoned industrial spaces during the 1990s and early 2000s. These unregulated venues became a breeding ground for creativity and cultural innovation, revitalising a city in economic crisis. Yet, after coordinated state crackdowns, most disappeared, leaving behind both nostalgia and a void in opportunities for experimentation. It is precisely this type of cultural fragility that Night School seeks to address.

The project was delivered by a consortium of leading organisations across Europe: VibeLab (Amsterdam/Berlin), Fuse (Brussels), Kaņepes Kultūras Centrs (Riga), BASIS Vinschgau Venosta (Italy), and Transversal Project (Sweden). Each partner brought unique expertise, ranging from global advocacy and heritage clubbing to rural innovation and cultural production. Fifteen early-career producers were selected through an open call and invited to participate in a multi-city training programme hosted in Riga, Brussels, and Silandro. Each venue served as a pedagogical site: Riga introduced practices of social sustainability and safer-space policies; Brussels, in the iconic techno club

Fuse, focused on entrepreneurial sustainability and economic resilience; and Silandro, in a repurposed fascist military barrack, demonstrated how rural hubs can nurture youth participation and cross-innovation in remote areas.

The pedagogy of Night School combined peer learning, expert mentoring, and situated practice. Rather than delivering abstract lectures, the programme immersed participants in environments where night culture is produced, managed, and negotiated daily. Micro-grants enabled participants to develop their own pilot projects, ranging from queer club nights to energy-conscious performance models. An online resource platform was designed to disseminate materials and extend the programme's reach beyond the immediate cohort.

Participant narratives illustrate the transformative potential of the programme. In Malmö, Jonna, organiser of Club Mermaid, drew on Night School to professionalise her drag club, legitimising queer nightlife as cultural production and gaining recognition from local policymakers. In South Tyrol, BASIS transformed authoritarian architecture into a cultural

commons, turning a former barracks into a space for clubbing, co-working, and cross-generational programming, thereby countering brain drain in a rural region. In Tirana, participants highlighted the precarity of grassroots music initiatives competing with state-sponsored mega-events, underlining the need for sustainable models rooted in local communities. In Porto, producers reflected on how nightlife regenerated decayed urban areas yet simultaneously triggered gentrification, illustrating the tension between cultural value and speculative urban economies. These experiences converge on several key insights: nightlife functions as a laboratory for cultural citizenship, where skills, networks, and identities are forged. Sustainability within this sector must be understood in environmental, social, and economic terms, with practices that prioritise ecological responsibility, inclusivity, and fair pay. Advocacy structures, such as night mayors or club commissions, have proven essential in bridging grassroots practices with political institutions, while zoning innovations like cultural-noise zones illustrate how regulation can protect cultural spaces.

The Night School project ultimately reframes nightlife as both a cultural engine and a civic commons. By embedding sustainability into its pedagogy, supporting experimentation with direct resources, and fostering advocacy capacity, it demonstrates the value of transnational cooperation in cultural training. Investing in early-career producers strengthens Europe's night-time economy and nurtures inclusive, ecologically responsible practices that enrich cultural life. Lessons from Night School highlight how nightlife should be recognised as a form of cultural infrastructure deserving protection, funding, and strategic planning. Structured learning pathways and venue-embedded curricula could professionalise this sector, while micro-grant schemes and lighter administrative burdens would enable more experimentation. The project's multi-city design illustrates the importance of connecting urban and rural cultural landscapes, helping smaller regions retain talent and build resilience. Evaluation must also evolve beyond counting visitors to include metrics of leadership diversity, skills development, and neighbourhood cohesion.

The project ultimately reframes nightlife as both cultural engine and civic commons. By embedding sustainability into its pedagogy, supporting experimentation with direct resources, and fostering advocacy capacity, Night School demonstrates the value of transnational cooperation in cultural training. It shows that investing in early-career producers not only strengthens Europe's night-time economy but also nurtures safer, more inclusive, and ecologically responsible cultural practices. From Malmö to Tirana, from Brussels to South Tyrol, the case of Night School reveals nightlife as a strategic resource for communities navigating the intertwined crises of climate change, social fragmentation, and economic precarity.

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Credits: Sung Dhin

SOCIAL IMPACT CANVAS FOR CREATIVE CHANGEMAKERS

The Social Impact Canvas was introduced during the Bautopia 4 - ECHN Hubs Meetup conference, where it was presented by professor Pille Pruulmann Vengerfeldt. It builds on the structure of established frameworks such as the Business Model Canvas and Lean Canvas but adapts them to address the unique needs and challenges of the creative industries. The tool is designed to stimulate critical thinking and meaningful conversations about impact, data, and value, enabling organizations to strengthen funding applications, engage stakeholders, and enhance public awareness of social issues.

The canvas guides its users through a systematic exploration of their work by mapping out audiences and beneficiaries, identifying the broader societal challenges that affect these groups, and analyzing their genuine needs. It encourages organizations to focus on the alignment of their solutions

A research-based intuitive tool, to improve value statements to financiers, create incentives for public funding, attract an audience, and spread awareness on important topics. The tool developed to help creative professionals and organizations articulate and measure the societal value of their work.

and value propositions with these needs, distinguishing between the people they directly engage with and those who benefit indirectly from their work. This distinction helps clarify impact pathways, ensuring that efforts are targeted and measurable.

A key feature of the canvas is its emphasis on understanding the wider landscape. Users are prompted to explore existing alternatives that audiences may already rely on, which helps them define what makes their approach distinctive. They are also encouraged to identify effective communication channels and partnerships that can amplify their impact. Alongside these strategic elements, the canvas incorporates financial considerations, encouraging organizations to analyze costs, ensure sustainability through diversified funding sources, and connect financial planning with social objectives.

Impact measurement is central to the Social Impact Canvas. It pushes practitioners to define specific, measurable outcomes that align with their mission and to develop robust metrics for assessing success. Data collection is positioned not only as a means of evaluation but also as a storytelling tool

to demonstrate the relevance and value of creative initiatives. Users are encouraged to identify reliable and accessible data sources, such as feedback from beneficiaries, municipal statistics, and internal documentation, in order to ground their decisions in evidence rather than assumptions. Practical applications of the canvas illustrate its versatility. For instance, a museum in Estonia used it to develop a media classroom for teachers, who were the primary audience, while students indirectly benefited from improved digital literacy. The project's impact was assessed through the digital creations of students and the observed growth in teachers' skills. Similarly, a festival in Pisa employed the canvas to understand its influence on urban regeneration, using municipal data to evaluate its reach, though challenges arose due to the lack of granular local data. These examples show how the tool can adapt to different scales and contexts, whether cultural institutions, community initiatives, or creative enterprises. The canvas is designed to be iterative, encouraging users to focus on one audience group at a time and to revisit and

refine their strategies as they progress. For complex projects, organizations can layer multiple canvases to represent different audiences or beneficiaries, enabling a more nuanced approach. By fostering structured reflection and informed decision-making, the Social Impact Canvas provides a practical method for creative changemakers to demonstrate the significance of their work, drive innovation, and respond effectively to social challenges.

You can download the canvas and its guidelines from [here](#).



Future DiverCities is a four-year European cultural-ecological regeneration project (2022–2026), funded by the European Commission's Creative Europe programme. Led by La Friche La Belle de Mai in Marseille, the consortium comprises 13 partner organisations, including Seconde Nature, Public Art Lab, BIOS, PLAI, Liepāja Culture Department, Kontejner, LAMA, ANTI, Savonia University, Trajna/Krater, European Creative Hubs Network, and INNOCAMP—with additional expertise provided by Ashoka (Poland), Krater (Slovenia), Savonia University (Finland), and ECHN. Projects run simultaneously in eight (sometimes nine) European pilot cities (Berlin, Zagreb, Liepāja, Kuopio, Marseille, Florence, Timișoara, and Athens) each organized into thematic clusters of Biodiversity, Commoning, and Impermanence.

FUTURE DIVERCITIES: REIMAGINING URBAN EMPTINESS THROUGH CULTURE AND ECOLOGY AT LA FRICHE

Cities are living organisms. They expand and contract, thrive and falter, grow proud skylines and leave behind forgotten scars. In every city, there are places that have fallen silent: abandoned warehouses, vacant lots, and disused factories, each holding traces of a past life. These places are often seen as problems, reminders of decline. But what if they were instead viewed as opportunities, blank canvases upon which a more ecological and imaginative future could be painted? Future DiverCities was born from this question. Conceived as a four-year European initiative, the project brings together eight cities, each serving as a test site for a new kind of urban transformation. The approach is unconventional. Rather than focusing solely on economic growth or

development, Future DiverCities uses culture and creativity as primary tools for regeneration. It encourages cities to see unused urban spaces not as empty, but as open, fertile ground for collaboration between citizens, artists, and ecologists. Two years into its journey, the project has evolved into a network of stories. Each city contributes its own experiments, successes, and hard-earned lessons, and in return, it draws inspiration from the others. Together, these cities are building a shared toolbox: methods for engaging residents, strategies for integrating ecology into design, and ideas for transforming industrial ruins into cultural ecosystems. At the heart of this exchange lies a simple yet radical idea: that culture, when rooted in community and ecology, has the power to heal cities. Nowhere is this vision more vividly alive than in Marseille, where La Friche la Belle de Mai stands as both a symbol of urban reinvention and a model for cultural leadership. Once a sprawling tobacco factory, the site has spent more than thirty years reinventing itself. What was once an industrial giant is now a dynamic cultural complex spanning 45,000 square meters, home to artist studios, theaters, exhibition

halls, public gardens, and playgrounds. Over the years, La Friche has become a heartbeat of Marseille's cultural life, a place where the city's creative energy collides with its rich, multicultural identity. With Future DiverCities, La Friche has turned its gaze even more deliberately toward ecology, experimenting with new ways of embedding environmental consciousness into every layer of its work. Its rooftop garden, an iconic feature of the site, has become more than a scenic terrace; it is now a living laboratory where biodiversity flourishes high above the city streets. Here, community gardening workshops invite neighbors to plant and harvest together, transforming the act of cultivation into a shared ritual. Children learn about urban agriculture through hands-on programs, while artists use the space as inspiration for works that weave nature into narrative. Art has always been La Friche's lifeblood, and through Future DiverCities, it has taken on an even more urgent ecological dimension. Artist residencies and installations tackle subjects like climate change, biodiversity loss, and the fragile relationship between cities and their natural

surroundings. Visitors wander through exhibitions that ask them to pause, reflect, and imagine alternative futures for the urban landscape. Beyond the walls of its galleries, La Friche has been opening up its outdoor spaces to community imagination. Residents from the surrounding Belle de Mai neighborhood (one of Marseille's most diverse and dynamic districts) have been invited to help design new public areas, from shaded seating and social spaces to experimental playgrounds for children. These collaborative efforts blur the line between cultural programming and urban planning, turning regeneration into a process of co-creation. The ecological transformation of La Friche also extends to its infrastructure. Water recycling systems, green roofing, and innovative waste management practices are being tested on-site, positioning La Friche as a pioneer among cultural venues seeking to lead by example. In addition, the site has become a hub for interdisciplinary dialogue, hosting workshops, conferences, and hackathons where artists, architects, ecologists, and urbanists exchange ideas and develop cross-disciplinary approaches to urban renewal.

Marseille itself offers a fitting backdrop for this experiment. The city has long been a place of contrasts: a bustling Mediterranean port shaped by waves of migration and commerce, marked by periods of industrial decline, yet always alive with energy and reinvention. In many ways, La Friche embodies the spirit of Marseille, gritty yet imaginative, rooted in history yet unafraid to reinvent itself.

What emerges from this work is a vision of regeneration that moves beyond the traditional markers of progress. It is not just about revitalizing a building or filling a vacant lot. It is about cultivating imagination, building trust, and nurturing ecosystems, both social and ecological. In this sense, La Friche's participation in Future DiverCities is not merely about Marseille; it is part of a larger European conversation about how cities can adapt to the crises of our time, from environmental collapse to social fragmentation, without losing their soul.

The story of La Friche la Belle de Mai is proof that urban emptiness does not need to be feared or erased; it can be embraced as a space of possibility. A tobacco factory once defined by mass production has become a sanctuary for biodiversity and

creativity. Concrete courtyards now host workshops, concerts, and gardens where neighbors gather. Empty spaces have transformed into sites of imagination and care.

As Future DiverCities enters the next chapter of its journey, Marseille's example offers inspiration to other cities across Europe and beyond. It shows that regeneration, when led by culture and guided by ecology, can do more than revive neighborhoods, it can transform how we think about our shared spaces. In a time when cities face unprecedented environmental and social challenges, La Friche stands as a beacon: a living reminder that creativity, when cultivated with care, has the power to reimagine not just buildings or neighborhoods, but the very fabric of urban life.



Credits: Omar Yassen

NOISE ZONES: DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO BE LOUD

Cities are often celebrated for their cultural life, the music that spills out of clubs and bars, the hum of conversation from sidewalk cafés, the laughter and clamor of festivals that fill public squares. Yet, as many cities have discovered, this vibrancy can be fragile. Neighborhoods once alive with creativity can quickly lose their pulse when gentrification takes hold. The very energy that draws people in, the grassroots culture, the artists, the small music venues and rehearsal studios is often the first thing pushed out when property values rise and “refined” businesses move in. What was once a thriving cultural hub becomes a quiet, sanitized district, its creative spark extinguished.

In Malmö, Sweden, this cycle was all too familiar. The city has long prided itself on its thriving grassroots arts scene, a patchwork of clubs, artist collectives, rehearsal spaces, and cultural centers that bring life to its streets. But as Malmö grew, pressure on

real estate intensified, and creative spaces were under threat. Noise complaints became a common weapon in this battle, a simple, bureaucratic way to silence culture. Residents and businesses moved into lively districts, only to demand the very silence that contradicted what made those areas special in the first place.

Enter the idea of Noise Zones, an initiative that turns this dynamic on its head. Instead of seeing music and late-night activity as a nuisance, Malmö began to formally recognize certain areas as Cultural Sound Zones, neighborhoods where music, festivals, and artistic activity are protected as part of the city's identity. Here, sound is not a disturbance but a feature. Anyone choosing to live or work in these districts accepts the presence of rehearsal rooms, clubs, and open-air events. In a bold move, the city essentially rewrote the social contract for these areas: if you come here, you come for the culture, not in spite of it.

This concept, led by Nicklas Johansson from the City of Malmö, is more than an urban planning strategy; it is a declaration of cultural values. The Noise Zones protect not just the venues but the entire ecosystem

around them, musicians who need affordable rehearsal space, small promoters trying to keep local scenes alive, communities that thrive on late-night gatherings, and the audiences who cherish this energy. It is a way of embedding culture into the legal and physical framework of the city, ensuring that grassroots creativity does not have to live in constant fear of displacement.

To walk through one of Malmö's designated Noise Zones is to step into a district that hums with life. The walls are lined with posters advertising underground gigs, club nights, and art shows. You might hear the muffled thump of a bass drum from a rehearsal studio or catch strains of a saxophone echoing down an alley. The energy is palpable, messy, and alive, a stark contrast to the sterile quietness of over-gentrified neighborhoods elsewhere. By enshrining sound as part of the area's identity, Malmö has preserved its cultural heartbeat, resisting the flattening effect of commercialization.

But this isn't just about music. The Noise Zones represent a philosophical shift in how cities approach culture. Too often, urban planning prioritizes market value over

creative vitality. A thriving neighborhood is seen as a success only if it attracts investment, even if that means displacing the very communities that made it attractive in the first place. Malmö's approach challenges this logic. Instead of trying to tame culture to fit the city, it reshapes the city to protect culture.

The impact of this initiative has rippled outward, offering a model for other European cities grappling with similar issues. Gentrification is not a uniquely Swedish phenomenon; it is a global reality, and grassroots culture is frequently the casualty. Malmö's Noise Zones provide a hopeful alternative: an explicit recognition that art, music, and nightlife are not side effects of urban life but central to its character.

Nicklas Johansson and his team have worked not only to create these zones but also to shift public perception. They have reframed noise complaints as evidence of vitality rather than disorder. They have encouraged residents and businesses to see themselves as participants in a living cultural ecosystem, rather than consumers entitled to silence. This cultural reframing is

just as important as the legal protections; it fosters a sense of ownership and pride in the city's creative soul.

The success of Malmö's Noise Zones lies in their simplicity and courage. They are a reminder that protecting culture doesn't always require massive budgets or sweeping redevelopment projects; sometimes, it simply requires a willingness to value sound, to understand that music, conversation, and celebration are part of what makes a city feel alive.

In a time when so many creative communities are being pushed to the margins, Malmö's stance is a radical act of care. By carving out space, not just physical but political, for cultural activity to thrive, the city has created a blueprint for urban environments that prioritize creativity over profit. The Noise Zones send a powerful message: a city that silences its culture loses its soul, but a city that embraces sound can remain vibrant, inclusive, and authentic.



REBUILDING TO LAST: RETHINKING CULTURAL SPACES FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

In every city, cultural spaces are often seen as places of human expression: theaters, galleries, performance halls, and community centers where stories are told, music is shared, and ideas circulate. Yet behind the stage lights and the gallery walls, these spaces are also physical structures that occupy land, consume energy, and interact with their surroundings. Too often, their relationship with nature has been invisible, an afterthought in a world that separates culture from ecology.

At the Bautopia Hubs meetup, Tiffany Fukuma from Trans Europe Halles presented the visionary project Rebuilding to Last, which was conceived to challenge that divide and to ask a simple but radical question: what if cultural spaces became sanctuaries not only for people but for all living beings?

Rebuilding to Last is funded by the European Union's Creative Europe programme. The project is led by Trans Europe Halles in collaboration with a consortium of 12 partner organisations, including Antena, BIM6D, Coloco, Eurecat, Kaapeli, Manifatture Knos, Nova Cvernovka, Organisation of Ibero-American States, Todo por la Praxis, Ufa Fabrik, and Université de Liège, and supported by associate partners such as the European Creative Hubs Network, European Dancehouse Network, and Asia-Europe Foundation. Spanning two years from 2022 to 2024, the initiative engages 16 partner organisations.

This initiative invites independent cultural centers across Europe to reconsider their role in a time of environmental urgency. It is not just about retrofitting buildings or greening rooftops; it is about rethinking the values that guide how we shape our shared spaces. The project encourages cultural venues to look closely at their own walls, courtyards, and surroundings, and to see them not as mere structures or empty plots of land, but as ecosystems — places where people, plants, and wildlife coexist. Rebuilding to Last is rooted in a conviction that cities must be reinvented at their core. For too long, urban planning has been driven by profit and efficiency, often at the expense of community and ecological health. This project imagines an alternative future: cities as vibrant, inclusive environments where humans live not apart from nature but in dialogue with it. Cultural centers, as hubs of creativity and civic life, are uniquely positioned to lead this transformation. They are already places where imagination thrives; now, they are being asked to extend that imagination beyond exhibitions and performances, into the way they inhabit the world.

This reimagining begins with attention. In participating cultural spaces, courtyards once paved and unused are being transformed into communal gardens, inviting neighbors and wildlife alike. Empty walls become canvases not only for murals but for green climbing plants, shifting the aesthetic and environmental character of the buildings. Rainwater harvesting systems and pollinator-friendly landscaping are being implemented not as ornamental gestures, but as integral parts of a new ecological ethic. The project encourages cultural centers to examine their carbon footprints, their construction practices, and even their daily rhythms, asking how each decision can bring them closer to harmony with the ecosystems around them. Yet Rebuilding to Last is not a purely environmental project; it is profoundly social. Its ambition lies in creating places that feel welcoming not only to all species but also to all communities. Many cultural institutions, despite their openness, are often perceived as closed-off or inaccessible. By reshaping courtyards into meeting places, planting gardens that invite interaction, and designing spaces that encourage slower, more reflective

experiences, these centers are reclaiming their role as communal anchors. Here, ecology becomes a tool for connection, a way to strengthen relationships between neighbors while fostering a shared responsibility for the land they inhabit. What makes this initiative unique is its rejection of the logic that dominates much of contemporary urban development: the relentless drive for profit, density, and expansion. Instead, Rebuilding to Last emphasizes care, longevity, and values-driven design. In a world where cities often grow at the expense of biodiversity, the project dares to ask what a city would look like if it were designed not just for human convenience but for the well-being of birds, insects, plants, and unseen organisms that sustain urban life. Cultural spaces become models of this vision — microcosms of a more balanced world, places where creativity and ecology intersect. This work is both urgent and hopeful. The climate crisis has already forced us to confront the fragility of our cities, but Rebuilding to Last invites us to see this moment not only as a challenge but as an opportunity. Cultural institutions, long seen as guardians of heritage and creativity, are

uniquely suited to lead this movement because they understand the power of narrative. They can show that buildings are not just containers for art but living participants in their environments. They can demonstrate that transformation is not about large-scale urban projects imposed from above, but about the quiet, consistent reimagining of spaces from within.

As the project unfolds, participating centers are creating a shared knowledge base: stories of experimentation, practical solutions, and reflections on what it means to create spaces that embody values of care and sustainability. This collective effort is about more than ecological design; it is about reshaping how we see the role of culture in our cities. In this vision, a cultural space is not only a place for artistic expression but a beacon of environmental consciousness, a community hub, and a sanctuary where all forms of life are acknowledged and welcomed.

Rebuilding to Last is not a quick-fix solution; its name itself is a declaration of patience and perseverance. The transformation it seeks is slow, deliberate, and deeply rooted in values that resist the extractive logic of modern urban development. It imagines

cities where the presence of a butterfly in a courtyard is celebrated as much as the opening night of a new performance, where a patch of wildflowers is treated as an act of cultural significance. It is a reminder that culture and nature are not separate worlds, but intertwined narratives that shape the way we live, build, and dream. In this way, Rebuilding to Last offers more than ecological renovation; it offers a cultural shift. It asks us to see every courtyard, every wall, and every pathway as part of a larger ecosystem, and to care for them accordingly. Through this project, cultural spaces become lighthouses in a changing world, pointing toward a future where cities are not battlegrounds between nature and humanity, but thriving landscapes of coexistence.

You can find [here](#) a four-dimensional publication that emerged from the project that combines an in-depth examination of expertise of independent cultural centres in ecological renovations with a hands-on manual for cultural workers on how to make their spaces and communities more in balance with ecosystems they are part of.

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