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Eurocities | Culture signs to fight climate change

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The Eurocities Culture Forum is driving members to participate in the call to action on sustainable culture, with the theme "Resilient and sustainable culture – local cultural policies supporting the ecological transition".

“Environmental protection knows no borders. We propose a collective commitment at European level for local sustainable and responsible cultural policies,” says Martine Aubry, Mayor of Lille, presenting the new ‘Eurocities Lille Call to Action for low carbon and more inclusive culture’.

In September 2022, the City of Lille presented a draft ‘call to action on sustainable culture’ at the Eurocities Culture Forum, where the theme was ‘Resilient and sustainable culture – local cultural policies supporting the ecological transition.’ In the months since, more Eurocities members have contributed to enriching the call to action.

How can culture make a difference?

Arts and culture are influential forces that can generate positive change. They move us, make us more receptive, and inspire individuals and collectives to act better for society and the environment. Culture also amplifies links and solidarity within urban areas.

However, cultural and artistic activities consume energy, resources and materials, and can generate several types of pollution. Local authorities “understand and share the urgency for action to meet the ecological imperative through all public policies, including those on culture,” reads the call to action. Culture can drive change while defending a quality offer that is welcoming for everyone.

“As leaders of European cities, and in line with the European Green Deal, by signing this call to action we commit to making our local policies more sustainable and inclusive,” explains Aubry. Marie-Pierre Bresson, Deputy Mayor for Culture at the City of Lille, elaborates: “We have to act on two pillars, the environment and inclusion, without which there can be no ecological transition.”

Pillars of sustainability and inclusion

It’s precisely under these two pillars that the call to action states its principles. These include, for example, choosing the most sustainable solutions when organising cultural events, which can take the form of promoting the reuse of materials and props. This principle should also guide all new public contracts.

Cities can also rethink the mobility of local actors organising cultural events, artists, artworks, equipment and especially audiences, for instance, by promoting sustainable forms of travel or by keeping it local.

As cities often own cultural and heritage buildings, they can also make an impact by improving their energy efficiency.

One of the principles is to assess the carbon footprint of events, while another invites municipalities to use technology to reduce the environmental impact of cultural activities. However, cities vow to keep in mind that such technology also has its own carbon footprint, which must be weighed too.

To guarantee access for all, the call asks cities to remove economic, socio-cultural, technological and geographical barriers and invites them to address vulnerable groups with ambitious cultural projects. Other principles state that cities should strengthen cultural diversity, including gender issues, and involve locals in designing cultural policies.

What cities commit to

“It’s up to all of us to face the intensification of climate change and the collapse of biodiversity across the globe. That is why we are making a Europe-wide appeal for low carbon and more inclusive culture,” says Aubry.

By signing the call to action, cities commit to implementing at least one priority from each pillar. They will also join and work with the new Eurocities task force on sustainable culture, where cities share expertise, know-how, and innovative practices on sustainable culture.

The fight against climate change is a question of solidarity and international cooperation

- Marie-Pierre Bresson

“The fight against climate change is a question of solidarity and international cooperation, and acting as a network makes us stronger,” says Bresson. “Eurocities is the voice of European cities for sustainable and shared culture.”

Signatories will use European funding to develop collaborative projects with other European cities. They also commit to raising awareness of the ecological transition and social inclusion among public and independent local cultural actors: cultural institutions, associations, artists, and audiences.

Make your signature count

“We have to act. And culture, even if it is a tiny part of greenhouse gas emissions, must play its part,” says Bresson. From early June, cities interested in making these commitments can have one of their political representatives sign it directly or formally adopt it through their city council.

The dedicated session at the Brussels Urban Summit will be the first opportunity to sign the call. The session will include a panel on sustainability in cultural policies with the Eurocities President, the mayors of Lille and Dresden, and a European Commission representative.

A second occasion for a ceremonial signature will be in October during the next Eurocities Culture Forum hosted by the city of Birmingham. Interested municipalities can also sign the call online and join Lille and other cities in committing to more sustainable and inclusive urban cultural policies.

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