



## EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Policy Area Culture

### Steering Group meeting

Date: 10/04/2025

Time: 11:00–16:15 CET

Online

### Participants

1. Kadri Jauram, Ministry of Culture of Estonia
2. Dāvids Garšva, Ministry of Culture of Latvia
3. Birutė Kazlauskienė, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania
4. Doerte Toerper, Ministry of Culture of Schleswig-Holstein
5. Jenna Melzer, Ministry of Culture of Schleswig-Holstein
6. Marcus Hagemann, Ars Baltica
7. Maili Roio, Baltic Region Heritage Committee (BRHC)
8. Felix Schartner Giertha, Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat
9. Paulina Nowak, Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat
10. Krista Petäjäjärvi, Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDCP)
11. Dace Resele, Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDCP)
12. Tiina Kasvi, Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)
13. Blagovestka Riiser, European Commission, DG Regio
14. Tom Schumacher, Baltic Sea Strategy Point
15. Magdalena Kleszczewska, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Poland (PA coordination)
16. Franziska Kapteina, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Areas, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of Land Schleswig-Holstein (PA coordination)
17. Kaarina Williams, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Areas, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of Land Schleswig-Holstein (PA coordination)
18. Anna Woźnicka-Hrncić, Ministry of Culture of Poland
19. Antoni Wyligala, Youth representative
20. Maria Śmigiel, AMI

### 1. Opening of the meeting and approval of the agenda

Magdalena Kleszczewska (on behalf of Zuzanna Przytkowska, absent due to sick leave) welcomed participants and explained the absence of the Chair. The proposed agenda was reviewed and approved with no changes or suggestions.



## Agenda overview

- Briefings from Steering Group members and observers.
- Coordinator update on recent and upcoming activities.
- Lunch break.
- Discussion on the strategic activity and ongoing Action Plan update.
- At 15:00: meeting with Jiménez Pumares (DG EAC) and a representative from the Baltic Sea Strategy Point to discuss the Action Plan update in a broader context.
- AOB and agreement on the next meeting date.

## 2. Steering Group Briefing

### Key highlights from Latvia

Presented by: *Dāvids Garšva*

- **Cultural industry support:**
  - Success of the animated film “*Flow*” led to increased funding for the animation sector.
  - The Cabinet of Ministers allocated an additional €3 million to support the international promotion of Latvian cinema.
  - Latvia will increase its contribution to the Council of Europe’s International TV Series Production Programme.
- **Public Media Reform:**
  - Merging of public broadcasters into one entity, **Latvian Public Media**, uniting radio and television under a single public service media umbrella.
- **Financial developments:**
  - A 6% salary increase was approved for employees in cultural institutions.
  - The government committed to co-funding the **Liepāja - European Capital of Culture 2027** initiative.
  - Support was given for reforming remuneration procedures for artistic collective managers.
- **Legislative and policy updates:**
  - Adoption of **Media Policy Guidelines 2024-2027**.
  - Amendments to the **Copyright Law** empower the National Electronic Mass Media Council to block illegal content providers.
  - Approval of the **Cohesive and Active Society Development Plan 2024-2027**.



- Launch of the **Roma Strategic Framework Implementation Plan** for 2024-2027.
- New regulation introduced to promote **digital transformation and modernization** in the media sector.

### Key highlights from Lithuania

Presented by: *Birutė Kazlauskienė*

- **New Government Programme (2025):**  
A new government and action plan were introduced, prioritizing:
  - Civic education
  - Fight against disinformation
  - Cultural heritage protection (tangible & intangible)
  - Fair remuneration for cultural sector workers
  - Promotion of culture in regions, philanthropy, and cultural education
  - Preparedness for emergency situations affecting cultural heritage
- **Digitalization of culture:**
  - New **2025-2027 Action Plan for Digitization of Cultural Content** aims to preserve and provide user-friendly access to digital cultural content under a unified system.
- **Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI):**
  - A new **CCI Competence Hub** was established under the Innovation Agency to build business capacity, foster innovation, and explore export opportunities.
  - Launch of the **CCI Acceleration Programme** to support sector growth.
- **Cultural engagement & accessibility:**
  - Record museum attendance in 2024: nearly 6 million visitors (up 3% from 2023), largely driven by international exhibitions and events.
  - €5.53 million allocated in 2025 to 20 professional performing arts institutions.
  - The **“Museum for well-being”** programme (2022-2024) improved accessibility for people with disabilities; 7 museum projects were funded last year.
- **Cultural Participation Programme (2024):**
  - Over 24,600 activities held with participation from 300-1,000 students per event.
  - €4 million allocated for programme implementation.

Magdalena Kleszczewska thanked Birutė for her concise yet comprehensive update and noted that digitization would be further discussed in the afternoon session.



## Key highlights from Germany (State of Schleswig-Holstein)

Presented by: *Jenna Melzer*

Jenna Melzer introduced herself as the new Head of the Department for Cultural Education in Schleswig-Holstein's Ministry of Culture. She joined the Steering Group at the end of 2024.

### Key cultural initiatives:

- **German-Danish Cultural Agreement (2025-2028):**
  - Longstanding initiative (since 2013) fostering cross-border cooperation between Germany and Denmark, especially focusing on youth and children.
  - Aims to build mutual respect and community spirit in the border region.
  - The Ministry contributes both financially and through committee participation
  - The new agreement period is 2025-2028.
- **Baltic Sea projects support:**
  - Schleswig-Holstein maintains a dedicated budget line to support Baltic Sea-related cultural projects.
  - Funded activities include well-known festivals such as **Folk Baltica**, and **Jazz Baltica**, as well as smaller initiatives.
  - Marcus will provide additional details on this during the observer session.
- **Institutional Cultural Support and International Cooperation:**
  - Institutional support is provided to international cultural organizations such as the **Coteo Francais**, the **American Society**, and the **German Auslands Gesellschaft**.
  - These organizations promote international cultural relations and cooperate with partner schools.
- **Contributions to Multilateral Cultural Platforms:**
  - The ministry funds Schleswig-Holstein's **membership in ARS BALTICA**.
  - Also contributes to the **Franco-German Cultural Council's German Secretariat** in Saarbrücken.
  - Participation in the Steering Group is in line with **Königsteiner Vereinbarung**.

Magdalena Kleszczewska thanked Jenna for her thorough and insightful update.



**Note:** No representatives were present from **Poland, Estonia** (to join later), **Sweden** or **Denmark**.

## Observers' Updates

### **ARS BALTICA**

Presented by: *Marcus Hagemann*

- Marcus Hagemann expressed appreciation for the previous in-person meeting in Gdańsk, highlighting its energy and importance, and welcomed the continued engagement online despite lower attendance.
- **Key project focus** for ARS BALTICA in 2025 includes:
  - Continued leadership role in the **BSR Cultural Pearls project**, particularly related to **culture and resilience** across the Baltic Sea region.
  - Strategy development for future activities, centering on **culture and dialogue** as tools for strengthening **resilience**.
  - Ongoing support and development of the **ABCD (ARS BALTICA Creative Dialogue)** format to provide space for intercultural exchange and engagement.
- **Future sustainability efforts:**
  - Multiple applications submitted to **Erasmus+**, aiming to **extend the capacity-building outcomes** of BSR Cultural Pearls beyond its current funding period (ends in 2025).
  - First-stage approval received; final decision expected in May.
- **Strengthened cooperation** with PA Culture and the State of Schleswig-Holstein:
  - A new contract signed supports further collaboration.
  - Recognized a more **dynamic and effective working atmosphere** within current partnerships.
- **Cultural diplomacy and cross-sectoral cooperation:**
  - Emphasis on **culture as a medium for dialogue**, not limited to traditional art forms but including the **Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI)** and broader societal engagement.
  - Participation in and support for the **Innoculture Conference** series, with the next edition planned in **Tallinn, Estonia**.
  - Advocacy for **innovation through culture** and fostering cross-sector synergies.
- **Festivals and intercultural dialogue:**



- While not directly organizing Jazz Baltica or other major Baltic Sea festivals, Marcus Hagemann noted their importance as models of **intercultural collaboration**, often organized by diverse, international teams.
- Highlighted the **Frequenz Festival (Kiel)**, an experimental music festival that recently secured significant funding for a "**Green Festival**" **cooperation project** involving 8 festivals across the region.
- This project promotes sustainability and cultural dialogue under the theme of a "**green future through culture**," running over a three-year period and involving **partners from multiple BSR countries**.

### **Baltic Region Heritage Committee (BRHC)**

Presented by: *Maili Roio*

- Maili informed the group that there have been few updates since the last meeting, but noted the BRHC is nearing the end of Estonia's chairmanship.
- Current focus is on organizing an **upcoming site visit and seminar**, involving both the **Heritage Committee and its six working groups**.
- **Three new working groups** have been established recently, which have only convened online so far.
- The upcoming seminar, titled "**Unwanted Heritage**", will take place in **May in Estonia**. Preparations are underway.
- Maili invited Steering Group members to reach out if they would like to receive further information about the seminar.

### **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**

Presented by: *Felix Schartner Giertha*

- Awaiting the delivery of a **report on the future of CBSS**, expected in **May** at the ministerial. The report is being prepared by former President of Estonia and former Lithuanian Foreign Minister.
- Regarding **regional identity and culture**, not much can be shared until the report is delivered.

BSR Cultural Pearls Project update:



- The project is currently in its **final (third) year of funding** and efforts are focused on **ensuring its durability and continuation beyond the project cycle**.
- A recent **application for a platform project** (which included Pearls) was unsuccessful; however, the team plans to reapply. Support or advice from the Steering Group on project sustainability is welcomed.
- The **third call for applications** (for the **2026 title year**, outside current funding scope) was **recently closed**, with **16 applications received**. This is seen as a strong sign of interest despite uncertainty over future funding.
- Over the past three years, the project has received **46 applications** from towns and cities across the Baltic Sea Region.

#### **Upcoming local ceremonies for 2025 Cultural Pearls:**

- Płock, Poland - *10 May 2025*
- Smiltene, Latvia - *1 June 2025*
- Helsingborg, Sweden - *6 June 2025*
- Alytus District, Lithuania - *7 June 2025*
- Kaskö, Finland - *16 June 2025*
- One ceremony already held in Peipsiääre, Estonia in March.

Felix Schartner Giertta extended an invitation to Steering Group members to attend any of the upcoming ceremonies as VIP guests

#### **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) - Youth and Intern**

Presented by: *Paulina Nowak*

- First participation in the Steering Group.
- Intern in the CBSS Regional Identity Unit since November 2024, supporting Felix Schartner Giertta and primarily working on youth-related topics with Aline Mayr.
- Based in Poland, assisting with various aspects of the Cultural Pearls project.

#### **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) - Baltic Sea Youth Forum**

Presented by: *Antoni Wyligata*

- Shared outcomes of a recent research report on youth engagement in cultural institutions across the Baltic Sea Region.





- Noted increased interest in youth participation from both grassroots and institutional levels.
  - Example: Youth Council at Moderna Museet (Stockholm).
- Participated as a jury member in the BSR Cultural Pearls assessment, providing insights from the youth perspective.
- Youth & culture highlights from Poland:
  - EU Youth Conference in Lublin, March 2025 (during Polish EU presidency), focusing partly on culture and youth.
  - New youth leadership programme launched at Warsaw Uprising Museum.
- Upcoming Stakeholder Meetings as part of reform:
  - First meeting: 15 April 2025 (invitation already circulated).
  - Frequency: Monthly, with the next one in June.

### Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)

Presented by: *Dace Resele*

- **Ongoing EU-funded Projects:**  
NDPC is currently engaged in **10 Creative Europe, Erasmus+, and Interreg projects**, focusing on key cross-cutting themes.
- **Key focus areas:**
  - **Arts & health:** 4 ongoing projects in this domain, aligning with Polish EU Presidency interests.
  - **Culture & sustainability:** Projects exploring the link between culture, energy consumption, and **social resilience** (including through BSR Cultural Pearls).
  - **CCI Capacity Building:**
    - Under the **Creative GPS** project, a **toolkit for professional development** of cultural professionals will be launched in **June**.
  - **Advocacy & networks:**
    - NDPC is active in **Culture Action Europe Nordic Hub**.
- **Major upcoming events:**
  - **Cultural Mobility Forum**
    - Co-hosted with **On the Move** in Riga, **29-30 April 2025**.
    - Theme: *Emerging artists and professional mobility in the post-pandemic and geopolitical context*.
    - Participation from major EU cultural networks across disciplines.
  - **CCS for Change Toolkit Launch:**
    - **Early May 2025**, in **Urmila, Latvia** (hybrid format).





- Toolkit is a result of the **CCI for Change** project (previously presented by Krista).
- **Future planning:**
  - NDPC will begin work with its **Steering Committee** and stakeholders to develop a **new strategy for 2026-2029**, reflecting changing communication priorities and external conditions

**Marcus Hagemann** emphasized the importance of the **Cultural Mobility Forum in Riga**, highlighted **On the Move's funding guides** for artist mobility - tools updated for BSR countries and crucial for cultural actors, and urged participants to take advantage of the regional proximity of the Riga forum as similar events are rare in the BSR.

## **Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) - Cultural Cities Commission**

Presented by: *Tiina Kasvi*

- **Overview of UBC Cultural Cities Commission:**
  - **Chair:** Tiina Kasvi.
  - Recently, the Commission has been undergoing a **strategic shift**, with a broader focus on **cultural services in cities**.
- **Recent developments:**
  - The **Cultural Cities Commission** has been **restarting** its work after a period of reduced activity and now has **more members** from cities around the Baltic Sea.
  - A **successful meeting** took place in **Brussels in December 2024**, which facilitated valuable **contacts with EU representatives** and other commissions.
- **Current projects:**
  - **Strategic Plan:** The Commission is in the process of developing a new **strategic plan** for the upcoming years.
  - **Joint meeting with Safe Cities Commission:**
    - Held in **Brussels**, focused on the **safety of cities** and **social resilience** of citizens.
    - A **guidebook** is being prepared in collaboration with the **Safe Cities Commission**, focusing on **small-scale events** and **security**. The aim is to address safety issues for local citizens organizing smaller, community-based events, as these are often overlooked compared to larger professional events.
    - **Sustainability** is also a key focus in these discussions.



## European Commission - DG REGIO

Presented by: *Blagovestka Riiser*

- **Macroregional Days (24th-25th September 2025):**
  - This event will take place in **Brussels**.
  - More details about the venue, workshops, and content will be sent soon.
- **5th Report on Implementation of the four Macroregional Strategies:**
  - This report is planned for adoption and submission to the **Council**.
  - The focus will be on **strategic tools** for cooperation and finding **joint solutions** in key areas.
- **Amendment of the Common Provision Regulation:**
  - A proposed amendment to the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** and **Just Transition Fund** is being discussed.
  - This amendment aims to allow national ERDF programs to use their funds for projects in **five or six priority areas**, including:
    - Affordable housing
    - Innovation
    - Water management
    - Cultural projects (in various programs)
    - Defence
  - **Regions bordering Russia and Belarus** are identified as needing particular support and opportunities for market diversification.
- **Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme:**
  - The **call for small projects** was launched on 25th March 2025.
  - There is an emphasis on **small projects targeting rural areas**, particularly aimed at **youth engagement** and fostering **optimism** in these regions.
- **Project Platforms:**
  - The **Commission** is interested in hearing feedback on the **Interreg Baltic Sea programme's project platform concept**.
  - The goal is to tell the story of individual projects and programs and highlight their achievements.
  - The Commission seeks reflections on the platform design, particularly on its **strategic importance**.

It was noted that the **Future Cities Platform** did not receive funding, despite being linked to the **Cultural Pearls** project. **Franziska Kapteina** mentioned that many applicants had a **mixed experience** with the call, as some struggled with the unclear scope of what the platform should entail.



**Felix Schartner Giertta** expressed positive thoughts about the concept of the project platform, appreciating its potential to leverage EU funds and resources. However, he noted that feedback from applicants (such as the Future Cities Platform) indicated a lack of clarity on whether the call was for new projects with new outputs or for capitalizing on existing work.

### **BSSSC (Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation)**

Presented by: *Kaarina Williams*

**Kaarina Williams** shared that **Schleswig-Holstein** is currently the **chair** of the **BSSSC** network. The network has already hosted various events, including last year's **annual conference** in **Kiel**. For this year, the **annual conference** will be part of the **EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region** forum. The **conference** will be held on **28th October 2025** in **Sopot**.

This special "**Day of Cities and Regions**" aims at enhancing the dialogue between local, regional, and EU actors, and offering **cultural actors** the opportunity to engage in the EU strategy. The **BSSSC** will also host an event in the evening of **28th October** in collaboration with **Cultural Pearls**. This will be a cultural evening showcasing **resilience through culture**, involving **cultural presentations** that may include **music** and other forms of expression.

Schleswig Holstein is not only chairing BSSSC right now but also acting as a **project partner** in **Cultural Pearls**, leading the **sustainability** discussions within the project. **Kaarina Williams** highlighted the importance of continuing the momentum built by **Cultural Pearls**, even after the current funding period ends in **2026**. She invited other partners to contribute their thoughts and ideas about ensuring the **sustainability** and **continuity** of the project beyond its funding cycle.

**Marcus Hagemann** echoed the importance of continuing the Cultural Pearls project, emphasizing that it is more than just a short-term funding initiative. He stressed that the project's results and experience need to be leveraged, and efforts should focus on how to sustain its impact in the long term. He pointed out that the funding isn't necessarily the main issue but rather how to capitalize on the existing results and partnerships to ensure the resilience through culture continues. **Marcus Hagemann** encouraged the group to think strategically about how the experiences and results from the Cultural Pearls project can be continued through other channels, even if direct funding isn't available. He called for new ideas and collaborative efforts to



ensure the continuation of this important project and its focus on resilience, which he described as essential for strengthening the feeling of safety among populations.

### 3. PA Culture coordination briefing

Presented by: *Magdalena Kleszczewska*

#### Recent work and progress:

Since the last meeting in Gdansk, the Policy Area Culture team has focused primarily on **reporting and drafting documents**: In January and February, the team worked extensively on preparing reports for the **Interreg Baltic Sea Region (BSR)** and the **National Coordinators Group**, as well as drafting the **2025 work plan**. These reports and documents were sent to the Steering Group for feedback and endorsement, including the revised **Action Plan**, **Interreg BSR report**, and the **annual report to the National Coordinators Group**.

- **Action Plan**: The action plan has been drafted (around 35 pages) in its initial form, and it will be further refined based on feedback. **Interreg BSR report** highlighted key achievements, including the **InnoCulture Conference in Gdansk** and the **Culture and Integration Workshop in Visby**. **Annual report to National Coordinators Group**: Content was largely based on the **Interreg BSR report** but tailored to the **NCG**. There was some feedback regarding the similarity between the two reports, which will be addressed.

#### Ongoing and upcoming work:

- **Action Plan update**: The team is still working on finalizing the action plan update. The National Coordinators Group (NCG) has requested more time to review the draft and will conduct interviews with all Policy Area Coordinators.

On **28th April**, PA Culture will meet with national coordinators.

- **Contribution to the "Securing the Future" Report**: As part of the **16<sup>th</sup> EUSBSR Annual Forum**, PA Culture must submit a **2-page contribution** for the "Securing the Future" report. The **deadline** for this is **2nd May**.
- **Social Integration Platform**: PA Culture is working with **Policy Area Education** on a **social integration platform**, following up on the **Culture and Integration**



workshop in Visby. A **pilot event** will be held in **May**, and members are invited to participate.

- **InnoCulture 2.0:** The InnoCulture conference will take place on **19th and 20th November** in Tallinn, Estonia. This year's event will be a collaboration with **Creative Estonia** and will mark **Estonia's presidency** of the EUSBSR. This event will also celebrate **Creative Estonia's 25th Anniversary**.
- **Interreg BSR Small Projects Call:** PA Culture is considering organizing an **ideation workshop** for the **Interreg BSR small projects call** launched in **March**. The decision on this workshop will be made in **May**.
- **Events and participation:** EUSBSR Monthlies (regular meetings of Policy Area and National Coordinators), CCI Network Meeting and ABCD Event in Schleswig-Holstein, Interreg BSR Event and the kickoff meeting for the Interreg BSR project platforms (May 2025).
- PA Culture is already preparing for the **Annual Forum 2025**, including a potential **workshop** (pending announcement).

#### Future of PA Culture and Action Plan Update

**Felix Schartner Giertta's** raised a concern about the **interview with the National Coordinators** regarding the **future of PA Culture**. He asked whether there has been any discussion or clarification on the lines to take for this interview, given the potential uncertainty surrounding the future of the policy area.

**Kaarina Williams** clarified that the interview was a standard procedure for all policy areas as part of the action plan update process. She reassured the group that the interview was not an indication that there are any specific doubts about the continuation of PA Culture and that she remains optimistic that there will not be any significant changes or discontinuation of the policy area.

**Blagovestka Riiser (DG Regio)** expressed the view that the **National Coordinators (NC) Group** is primarily seeking to **understand better** what each **policy area** is doing and how they are connected to the **Baltic Sea Strategy**. She explained that many policy areas are also involved in other **Baltic Sea cooperation frameworks**, which adds complexity to their understanding of the **added value** of each area. She emphasized the importance of being able to communicate the **impact** and **strategic importance** of the EUSBSR and PAs in a **concise** and **precise** manner. She highlighted the difficulty of advocating for the strategy to **politicians** and **stakeholders**. Her hope is, that the upcoming **revision of the action plan** will address these concerns.

She also noted that the **PA Culture** group is in a **strong position** due to the **flexibility** and **opportunities** provided by **Interreg programmes**. Blagovestka suggested that while the **monthly NC meetings** are important for collaboration, there may be



**strategic value** in inviting some members of the NC Group to **PA Culture meetings**, particularly to key events like the **InnoCulture Conference**. This could help enhance awareness of the added value that PA Culture brings to the Baltic Sea Strategy.

Kaarina Williams wanted to know if other macro-regional strategies (besides the **Baltic Sea Region**) have similar **interview processes** with national coordinators, specifically related to the **added value** of policy areas. She found it interesting that the **NC Group** in the Baltic Sea Region seems to regularly question the value of the PAs and frequently requests justification. She noted that ideally, the **NC Group** should be more proactive in advocating for the strategy as a whole, rather than being in a position of constantly questioning the added value of policy areas.

**Felix Schartner Gierdda** emphasized that **PA Culture** is the only **policy area** that directly addresses critical and topical issues such as **cohesive societies**, **democratic resilience**, and **citizen engagement**. He pointed out that culture plays a vital role as the lifeblood of society, yet its practical mechanisms and the link between culture and societal cohesion are often taken for granted and not sufficiently highlighted.

He referenced the Latvian strategy for a cohesive society, which is explicitly placed under the Ministry of Culture in Latvia. This underlined the explicit link between culture and societal cohesion, something that could be made more visible in the context of PA Culture's activities.

## Break

### Key highlights from Estonia Presented by: *Kadri Jauram*

Kadri Jauram shared an update on **Estonia's efforts in safeguarding cultural heritage**, particularly **digital heritage** and **cross-border preservation**. She noted that this is a **priority** for Estonia at both **international and EU levels**, and they have been actively working with the **European Commission** on these topics. Recently, the **EU Resilience Strategy** was published, with **culture explicitly mentioned** in the





strategy, opening the door for cross-border heritage preservation initiatives. Kadri expressed hope that they can now propose concrete actions to safeguard heritage.

**Franziska Kapteina** pointed out that **Birutė Kazlauskienė** from Lithuania had also spoken about **measures for emergency preparedness and digitalization**, which are aligned with **Estonia's efforts** on safeguarding cultural heritage.

Kadri Jauram appreciated this, explaining that Estonia has also developed a **protection list** for priority cultural objects and that **culture** is included in their **defense plan**, reflecting the importance of **heritage in resilience and security contexts**.

She also mentioned that **Estonia** is focusing more on the **rights of artists** and their **social status**, which is currently being discussed at an informal ministerial meeting and a conference in **Warsaw**. She shared that the **European Commission** is working on a **future cultural strategy** for the EU, which will likely include **heritage protection** and **freedom of artistic creation**. Kadri Jauram referred to the review of the EUSBSR and noted that the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is also undergoing a similar review, with the final report expected by **May**. It will be presented at a significant conference in **early May**, including **Leonard Marie** and other political and societal discussions. She shared that **heritage protection** will be discussed during the upcoming **meeting of Baltic and Nordic Ministers of Culture**. She noted that **Estonia** will be addressing these topics in **Brussels** at the **EU Ministers' AOB (Any Other Business)** on **13 May**, focusing on **digital heritage safeguarding** and other related issues.

#### 4. EUSBSR PA Culture Strategic Activity

Presented and facilitated by: *Franziska Kapteina*

**Franziska Kapteina** introduced a proposal for a **Policy exchange** aimed at enhancing **cooperation on cultural heritage** during times of crisis. She noted that there has been a lot of activity on the EU, macro-regional, and national levels regarding cultural heritage and preparedness, and this initiative would support these ongoing efforts.

**Background:** Estonia is already taking steps to preserve **cultural heritage** in the long term, particularly in the context of cross-border preservation, and is advocating for a **joint EU approach** as part of a broader **preparedness strategy**. Estonia has been





working on aligning these efforts with existing **EU digitalization standards** and initiatives focused on the **accessibility and long-term storage of cultural heritage**.

The proposed Policy Exchange would align well with the goals of **PA Culture's Action Plan**. Franziska proposed that **PA Culture's coordination team** would take care of the logistics. She suggested that **Kadri Jauram (Estonia)** would play a crucial role in coordinating the initiative on Estonia's side, ensuring that the Policy Exchange aligns with Estonia's ongoing efforts on **cultural heritage preservation**.

Franziska Kapteina asked other members of the Steering Group to help by: **Contacting and recruiting relevant stakeholders and administrative personnel** from their countries or regions and ensuring that **experts from national states** involved in **cultural heritage preservation** could take part in the exchange and bring the input back to their national policies.

The goal would be to establish **first connections** between **national administrations**, exchange best practices, and potentially **launch a coordinated Baltic Sea Region initiative**. Franziska mentioned that the **Policy Exchange** could take place in the **second half of the year**, but the date was not fixed yet. She invited feedback from the Steering Group on the feasibility and potential for support for this initiative.

**Kadri Jauram** expressed general **agreement** with the idea of the **Policy Exchange** and its potential value for **policy dialogue and exchange of ideas**. She indicated that she needed to **consult with experts** in the **Estonian Ministry** to ensure everything is aligned and can be supported from their side. She highlighted that Estonia's role as the **chair of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)** in the **second half of the year** presents an excellent **timing** for this initiative. Kadri confirmed her **initial support**, with the need for further discussions before fully committing.

In the absence of further immediate feedback, Franziska suggested allowing time for the proposal to sink in and committed to following up with a written summary outlining the objectives and structure of the initiative, along with specific expectations of the Steering Group.

Franziska then transitioned to the **"Strategic Activities"** agenda point, explaining that this section aimed to outline how the objectives proposed in the draft Action Plan would be implemented. She highlighted several current and planned **strategic actions**, including:



- The establishment of a **cross-sectoral platform on culture and integration**, as previously introduced by Magdalena Kleszczewska. This initiative aims to foster more transnational cooperation on cultural integration.
- Preparation for the upcoming **InnoCulture conference**, focused on **skills development in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)**. The expected outcomes include strengthening the CCI network, supporting upskilling efforts, and building synergies between existing initiatives.

Franziska noted early discussions and possible connections with several Policy Areas (PAs), including:

- **PA Education**, regarding the integration platform.
- **PA Spatial Planning**, with exploratory talks underway.
- **PA Secure**, with potential collaboration on a joint workshop.
- **PA Tourism**, with promising areas for cooperation, including sustainable tourism.

She then introduced several **strategic instruments** outlined in the draft Action Plan, inviting feedback on their feasibility and effectiveness:

1. **Policy exchanges:** Structured, moderated exchanges between national administrative personnel. Proposed topics include:
  - AI, funding mechanisms, and support structures for CCI
  - Status of artists
  - Accessibility of culture and heritage in crisis
  - Climate change adaptation of cultural heritage
2. **Stakeholder meetings:** Focus areas include effective funding mechanisms and defining indicators for success. The goal is to produce **policy working papers** from stakeholder input, offering guidance to policy makers.
3. **InnoCulture Conference:** A regional network meeting for cultural stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region intended to strengthen cultural networks and spark transnational cooperation. It may also host targeted activities not covered by other formats.
4. **Thematic papers:** Analytical papers and recommendations focused on:
  - Mental resilience, identity-building, and the social value of culture
  - The current state and needs of the CCI sector in the region
  - Funding and support structures for CCI



These papers are intended to provide a **basis for policy discussions and advocacy** regarding culture's role in addressing social challenges.

Franziska introduced an additional **strategic instrument** listed in the Action Plan under the heading *Material*. This refers to the planned development and collection of supporting resources addressing key challenges and strategic topics. This includes material on:

- how to effectively convey the value of culture as a key driver of societal resilience.
- improving accessibility to culture.
- **youth involvement**, offering practical approaches to better engage younger audiences in cultural processes.

The aim of these materials is to support more coherent cultural policies and improved administrative practices across the region. Franziska Kapteina emphasized that by offering ready-made resources, the initiative hopes to contribute to policy development and implementation at national levels.

She also elaborated on the **use of platforms** as a strategic instrument, clarifying that the reference is not to Interreg platforms, but to stakeholder platforms aligned with the Strategy. As an example, she mentioned PA Education's transnational stakeholder working groups. In a similar spirit, the **Culture and Integration Platform** is currently being established. Additional platforms were proposed:

- A **platform on sustainable tourism practices**, potentially in cooperation with PA Tourism.
- A **CCI platform**, connecting actors from different branches of the cultural and creative sectors to identify shared challenges, opportunities for collaboration, and joint advocacy efforts.

These platforms are intended to generate new partnerships, initiatives, and cooperation—both across sectors and across borders within the Baltic Sea Region.

Franziska then addressed how **the Steering Group could support the implementation of the mentioned strategic instruments**:

- **Policy Exchanges**: Support in identifying and recruiting administrative experts from national institutions.



- **Stakeholder Meetings:** Help in reaching out to suitable stakeholders and inviting relevant participants from member states.
- **InnoCulture Conference:** Steering Group members are encouraged to attend and promote the event within their national networks.
- **Policy papers:** Assistance with dissemination to relevant actors and institutions would be highly valuable.
- **Material collection:** Members could contribute by sharing existing materials and resources on key topics and help distribute materials developed by the PA Culture team.
- **Platforms:** Steering Group members are invited to nominate or connect national stakeholders working in cultural fields to the emerging platforms, particularly the Culture and Integration Platform.

Franziska acknowledged the ambitious scope of the Action Plan and noted that the team was aware of the long-term nature of these goals. She briefly reminded participants of the structure of the draft Action Plan, which includes overarching actions, strategic goals, corresponding activities, and expected outcomes. She then opened the floor for **feedback on the proposed strategic instruments**. Participants were invited to share their views either during the discussion or anonymously via **Mentimeter**.

**Dāvids Garšva** expressed appreciation for the breadth and ambition of the presented Action Plan and strategic instruments. While overall very positive, he raised a clarifying question about the nature of the proposed *platforms*, asking whether they are ad-hoc groups or digital tools. He also requested further elaboration on the *policy papers*, noting his interest in their development and use.

**Franziska Kapteina** explained that the platforms are not digital tools but **permanent stakeholder working groups**, meeting regularly to exchange knowledge, coordinate efforts, and build transnational partnerships. These groups are designed to support stakeholders in aligning their activities and to form a basis for joint projects and lobbying. As an example, she referred to the emerging *Culture and Integration Platform*, which connects initiatives across the region focused on social inclusion through culture.

She then addressed the *policy papers*, noting that the term may cause confusion, especially given earlier discussions within the Steering Group about their official status. She emphasized that while the documents aim to inform policy, they would be positioned more as “**working policy papers**” or “**expert recommendation papers**” rather than formally endorsed outputs.



**Blagovestka Riiser (European Commission, DG REGIO)** supported this clarification, agreeing that the term *policy paper* could be misleading. She suggested using alternative terms such as *expert papers* or *recommendation papers*, particularly considering the limited mandate of some Steering Group members to officially endorse policy content.

**Magdalena Kleszczewska** confirmed that the team had already agreed to use the term *working policy papers* in the Action Plan draft, noting the importance of maintaining an appropriate level of formality and avoiding expectations of endorsement from national representatives.

Blagovestka Riiser then offered a strategic perspective on the upcoming **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**, noting that the next proposal from the European Commission is expected in **July 2025**. She highlighted a shift towards a **policy-driven budget**, which may result in fewer programmes but more targeted funding instruments aligned with EU policy priorities. She encouraged the group to consider how culture fits into this evolving landscape, particularly in areas such as **digitalisation, skills development, and governance capacity**. Blagovestka Riiser emphasized the importance of preparing concise descriptions of instruments and thematic priorities to position the culture-related work effectively in relation to future EU programmes, especially **Interreg**, which remains under shared management and offers strong alignment opportunities.

She concluded by congratulating Franziska on the comprehensive presentation, underlining that the timing is ideal to influence future programme directions.

**Franziska Kapteina** highlighted the increasing challenge of reduced funding opportunities for cultural actions, noting that many **Interreg programmes** don't include culture as an explicit priority. As a result, she stressed the growing importance of **cross-sectoral approaches**, arguing that the cultural sector must demonstrate its relevance across broader societal themes to remain competitive in future funding landscapes. She emphasized that culture must be positioned as a critical factor in various policy areas to secure meaningful support.



**Blagovestka Riiser** responded by sharing feedback from Member States regarding the forthcoming **Interreg programming period**, indicating that a shift away from narrow, predefined objectives is anticipated. Instead, a **broader and more flexible thematic structure** is expected, which could provide **greater opportunities to integrate culture** into cross-cutting issues such as digitalization, sustainability, and social innovation.

She commended the creativity of some cultural project proposals that effectively linked culture to diverse areas, such as sustainable energy, suggesting that such an approach will become increasingly valuable. She encouraged the group to continue developing cultural initiatives with **interdisciplinary relevance**, noting that this adaptability would help culture secure a stronger position in future EU policy and funding frameworks.

Franziska welcomed this feedback, calling it "good news" for PA Culture and the broader cultural field. She affirmed the need to continue demonstrating the **flexibility and systemic importance of culture**, which could open new doors under less restrictive programme conditions.

Returning to the topic of **policy working papers**, Franziska addressed **Dāvids Garšva's** earlier question by further clarifying their intent. She described these papers as **expert-driven compilations of perspectives** from various actors across the Baltic Sea Region. For example, in the area of **funding and support structures in the cultural and creative industries**, the papers aim to present the lived experiences, needs, and analyses of stakeholders working within the sector. She explained that the goal is to **bridge the communication gap** between cultural actors and administrators. Drawing on insights from the previous **InnoCulture conference**, she noted that many creatives feel misunderstood or poorly represented by administrative bodies when it comes to funding frameworks. The working policy papers are thus intended to **translate sector-specific knowledge into accessible insights** for policymakers, helping to inform more tailored and effective support mechanisms.

Franziska Kapteina introduced a new platform project titled **RAVES - Resilient ecosystems for AV and M entrepreneurial support**, a PA Culture-related initiative that successfully received **Interreg funding**. She clarified that this project is separate from the strategic stakeholder platforms discussed earlier and focuses specifically on **skills development and economic support in the cultural and creative sectors (CCS)**. Franziska explained that RAVES brings together **projects from the film, music,**





**and gaming industries** to enhance business support organisation of the CCIs in all three sectors. The project arose from the observation that while many Baltic Sea Region projects supported CCIs, they were often **sector-specific**. RAVES addresses this gap by creating a **cross-sectoral ecosystem** that unites efforts from different branches of the CCS.

The aim of the project is to:

- **Streamline support strategies** across regions and sectors.
- Enhance **public authority support mechanisms**.
- Foster **talent retention** and **innovation** through collaboration.
- Encourage the **economic success** of cultural actors through shared learning.

The **RAVES partnership** includes **13 core partners** with **22 contributing projects**. **PA Culture** and **NDPC** (Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture) are involved as **associated partners**.

She expressed satisfaction that the project succeeded in the **first round of Interreg funding**, describing it as a strong example of **cross-sectoral coordination and innovation** in the region.

**Magdalena Kleszczewska** acknowledged **Franziska Kapteina's pivotal role** in the project's creation, crediting her for identifying and connecting existing projects across sectors to form a coherent platform. She noted that this effort began early last year and praised its success as a **PA Culture-driven initiative**.

## 5. Input on the Action Plan update

**Franziska Kapteina** initiated a brief interactive **Mentimeter session** to gather input from Steering Group members on the **PA Culture Action Plan update**. She explained that the goal was to collect **quick, informal feedback** on the strategic goals and instruments outlined in the draft. Participants were encouraged to submit short answers on the following points:

1. **Innovative instruments or improvements** that could help achieve the strategic goals. Example already noted: Avoid the term *policy papers* in favor of *expert papers* (as suggested earlier by Blagovestka Riiser).





2. **Missing elements** in the current **strategic goals or actions** of the draft.
3. **Additional considerations or flaws** to keep in mind during the action plan update process.

**Blagovestka Riiser** requested clarification on the distinction between **stakeholder meetings**, **InnoCulture**, and **platforms**.

Franziska explained:

- **Stakeholder meetings** are *one-off*, moderated exchanges, typically online.
- **Platforms** are *ongoing working groups* that aim to become *self-sustaining* over time.
- **InnoCulture Conference** is a recurring **in-person networking event**, designed to highlight cultural cooperation and innovation across the region.

**Magdalena Kleszczewska** added that **InnoCulture** is envisioned as the **first dedicated forum for culture in the Baltic Sea Region**, meant to **strengthen and showcase a shared regional cultural identity** on the international stage.

Franziska closed the session by thanking the group for their **constructive input and engagement**, noting that feedback from this session will **inform and improve the action plan update**.

## 6. EUSBSR Action Plan update - Policy Briefing on cultural policy

**Tom Schumacher (Baltic Sea Strategy Point)** opened the next part of the meeting, which was dedicated to an exchange on strategic priorities and future plans between **PA Culture** and the **European Commission (DG EAC)**.

Objective of the Session was to discuss the **update process** of the **PA Culture Action Plan**. The goal was an exchange on **strategic priorities** from both **PA Culture** and the **European Commission's** side and to identify areas of **alignment and cooperation** going forward.



Tom Schumacher provided a **brief overview** of **macro-regional strategies (MRS)** in the EU, objectives of EUSBSR which remain **unchanged** and will continue to guide all updates and activities, and the EUSBSR Action Plan structure and purpose.

Changes during AP updates may include the redefining of objectives, merging of actions and, in rare cases, the closing or restructuring policy areas.

The current Action Plan update aims to **clarify the focus** of each action, to improve **coherence and strategic planning** for implementation and to align it with the "pathway logic":

1. **Outputs:** Immediate deliverables (e.g., events, papers, pilot solutions).
2. **Outcomes:** Self-sustaining effects (e.g., improved policy, shifted attitudes).
3. **Impact:** Real-world, positive change in the region (environmental, societal, economic).

The goal is to **increase the EUSBSR's tangible impact** across the Baltic Sea Region through better alignment and planning.

The Action Plan Update timeline now looks as follows:

- **February 2025:** First round of draft updates submitted.
- **Late June 2025:** National Coordinators Group to decide on **Policy Area (PA) structure and composition**.
- **Autumn 2025:** Next drafting round for selected PAs.
- **Winter/Spring 2026:** European Commission **internal consultation**.
- **May 2026 (tentative):** Final **Action Plan publication**.

**Magdalena Kleszczewska** presented **PA Culture draft Action Plan**. She first described the core premises: we live in a time of **multiple crises** (disinformation, political instability) also affecting the Baltic Sea Region; culture is a **unifying and stabilising force**.

She then presented three **actions of PA Culture**, supporting all three **EUSBSR main objectives**.



### Action 1: Enhance Skills and Structures in CCS

- **Strategic Goals:**
  - Improve policy development
  - Boost entrepreneurial & cross-sectoral skills
  - Reform funding models to ensure CCS sustainability
- **Contribution to EUSBSR:** Primarily supports **Increase Prosperity**

### Action 2: Foster Cultural Identity and Societal Resilience

- **Strategic Goals:**
  - Strengthen **mental and societal resilience**
  - Highlight the **value of culture**
  - Promote **inclusive access** to cultural participation
- **Contribution to EUSBSR:** Primarily supports **“Connect the region”**

### Action 3: Sustainable Culture and Culture of Sustainability

- **Strategic Goals:**
  - Connect Culture and Sustainability
  - Make Culture and Cultural Heritage Greener
  - Integrate Innovation into Cultural Heritage
- **Contribution to EUSBSR:** Primarily supports **“Save the sea”**

Franziska Kapteina added that there are already existing efforts in the Baltic Sea Region connecting culture and sustainability, but more untapped potential exists. One area of focus is how culture can contribute to sustainable behaviors.

The **Action Plan** was developed based on **feedback** from Steering Group members and lessons learned over the past two years. All **feedback** from the meetings has been incorporated into the **draft action plan update**, and future adjustments will remain possible as feedback continues. While the initial **formats** (policy exchanges, regional events, expert papers, platforms) are planned, the PA culture team remains **flexible**. Formats may evolve if needed, depending on **what works best** for achieving the goals.

**Tom Schumacher** concluded the session by recognizing the cross-sectoral themes raised, including resilience, greening culture, heritage, and health relations. He noted the emphasis on social resilience, economic benefits from culture and creative industries, and the connection to the New European Bauhaus, highlighting the broad scope of integration in the action plan.



Tom Schumacher then handed over the floor to **Marta Jiménez -Pumares** from the European Commission -- expert on European-level cultural policy, inviting her to present the Commission's plans and priorities.

Marta Jiménez-Pumarez acknowledged the busy and evolving nature of cultural policy within the Commission, with **Commissioner Glenn Micallef** now dedicated to culture, as opposed to the previous structure where culture was part of a larger portfolio. This shift is seen as **positive** for the sector as **Commissioner Glenn Micallef** works closely with other commissioners and the **Executive Vice President (EVP) for Education and Employment**, bringing a more active, collaborative approach to cultural policy.

Marta Jiménez -Pumares then highlighted four key tasks that the commissioner was given in his cultural mandate:

1. **The Culture Compass** (which Marta focused on for the presentation)
2. **Improving working conditions** for artists and cultural professionals
3. **Improving access to culture and cultural heritage** for youth in Europe
4. **Developing an AI strategy** for the cultural sector

She elaborated that the **Culture Compass** is a strategic initiative aimed at addressing challenges like **COVID**, **Russia's war against Ukraine**, **AI**, and the **green and digital transitions**, which arose after the **2018 New Agenda for Culture**. The **Culture Compass** aims to be a stable, overarching strategy that incorporates principles like **artistic freedom**, **inclusion**, and **democratic values**—principles that should endure beyond changing governments and over four-year work cycles.

The **Culture Compass** will take the form of a **communication document**, with consultations already underway and a target completion date for the end of **2025** or early **2026**. This will be followed by a **joint declaration** from the **Commission**, **Parliament**, and **Council** to further solidify these principles and actions.

Marta also noted that an **Eurobarometer** survey was launched in **March 2025**, which will provide an updated view of **public attitudes towards cultural heritage**, and the results will be available for the **Council meeting in May**.

She then acknowledged that cultural policy at the European level works through multiple layers and strategic documents. While the **New European Agenda for Culture** remains outdated, Marta emphasized that the **EU Work Plan for Culture (2023-2026)** is a more current and relevant framework.



Marta Jiménez-Pumarez wrapped up by pointing out that the overall goal of the European Commission is to **mainstream culture in all EU policies**—a goal that intersects with **social inclusion, environmental issues, employment, digital transformation**, and more, aligning with many of the topics raised in earlier discussions.

Marta continued by detailing the **EU Work Plan for Culture (2023-2026)**, which is centered around four key priorities, each with specific actions:

1. **Artists and Cultural Professionals:**
  - This priority focuses on improving **working conditions, artistic freedom, digital transformation**, and the **green transition**.
  - It also includes a specific action dedicated to **European video games**.
2. **Culture for the People:**
  - This priority emphasizes **democracy, culture and health**, and **libraries**.
  - There will be an upcoming **report on the discoverability of European content** in the **digital environment**.
3. **Culture for the Planet:** Marta elaborated on this priority, especially given her expertise in **culture and sustainability**. This priority involves:
  - **Climate action through culture**
  - **Fighting the trafficking of cultural goods**
  - **Safeguarding heritage** against both **natural and human-made disasters**

She tied this to discussions from earlier, noting the connection to **crisis preparedness** and **climate-related risks**, which align with the **EUSBSR** goals.

4. **Governance and International Relations:**
  - This priority includes a focus on **Ukraine**, specifically on **cultural heritage preservation** and **preparedness**.
  - It also touches on **democracy** and **human rights** defense and promotion.

Marta Jiménez-Pumarez also discussed one of the most successful implementation methods for these priorities, the **Open Method of Coordination (OMC)**, which includes expert groups from Member States working on different thematic topics. There are **four ongoing expert groups**:

- **Culture and Health**
- **The Role of Libraries**
- **International Cultural Relations**
- **Stimulating the Green Transition of the Cultural and Creative Sectors**



She manages the **green transition** expert group, which focuses on supporting the **cultural and creative sectors (CCS)** in the transition to sustainability. This expert group consists of **22 Member States**, with experts from both the **culture and environment ministries**, some of whom are meeting for the first time to create dialogue on these issues. The group is working on a **report** on this topic, expected to be released in **autumn 2025**.

Finally, Marta Jiménez-Pumarez touched on **funding**, emphasizing that while **Creative Europe** is the **dedicated program for CCS**, it does not hold the most funding for the sector. There are other sources of funding available, and she plans to compare these in future discussions to highlight the broader opportunities for the **cultural and creative sector**.

She continued by discussing the **different EU funding opportunities** available for cultural projects. She highlighted the broad range of options beyond **Creative Europe**, including **Cohesion Funds**, **Horizon Europe**, the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, and **Erasmus Plus**. She explained that the EU has many funding avenues that can support the cultural and creative sectors (CCS), and many of these funds are spread across various programs and projects.

She also mentioned that **Creative Europe** has introduced a **sustainability dimension** to its funding criteria. Projects applying for funding are encouraged to have a **sustainability factor**, and the Commission is also working on making **Creative Europe** itself more sustainable.

Marta shared details about two important resources:

1. **Funding Guide**: This simple online tool helps stakeholders find **EU funding opportunities** for different cultural projects. With just three basic filters, stakeholders can easily navigate the complex EU funding landscape.
2. **Creatives Unite**: A platform established during the **COVID-19 crisis** for stakeholders to organize, share information, and support each other. The platform has become a significant reference for the sector and is self-managed by the cultural community. It includes sections on **financing**, **intellectual property**, **mobility**, and **greening**, among other things.

Marta Jiménez-Pumarez wrapped up her presentation by expressing her availability to provide further details on any of the topics she covered.





Tom Schumacher then acknowledged the importance of the information Marta provided and raised the central question from Franziska Kapteina: **How to connect the work done by the PA Culture with EU objectives?** Franziska emphasized that although there are many aligned projects, it is unclear how to **benefit from these EU objectives**, particularly when not applying for something like the **European Bauhaus** prize. She mentioned that the challenge is in expanding beyond their **macroregional focus** to connect more effectively with projects and funding from wider European networks.

She shared an experience where she tried to connect with participants in **Creative Europe** projects, especially those in the **Baltic region**, and found a lack of connection with the wider **Baltic cooperation** despite the geographical overlap. She questioned why there was no internal connection between **Creative Europe** and regional cooperation formats like the **Baltic Sea cooperation**, and asked Marta for guidance on how to bridge these gaps and make better connections between these different ecosystems.

Marta Jiménez-Pumarez acknowledged the complexities that come with the macroregional approach, particularly in the context of EU funding programs like *Creative Europe*. She recognized that projects with broader geographical diversity are often more competitive, making it harder for initiatives limited to a specific region (e.g., the Baltic Sea Region) to succeed in securing funding.

She agreed that there is currently a lack of full integration between macroregional strategies (e.g., the *EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region - EUSBSR*) and EU-level funding programmes, and highlighted this as a missed opportunity for synergy and collaboration.

Marta committed to taking the feedback back to her teams. She expressed interest in exploring structured efforts to raise awareness and foster connections between EU funding instruments and macroregional strategies. She concluded by affirming that better alignment would be beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

Tom Schumacher closed the session by acknowledging the **valuable feedback** and ideas shared, particularly the **macroregional challenges** that both Franziska and Kaarina had highlighted, along with Marta's useful insights on how to address these issues more effectively.





Next steps seemed to focus on **better integration of macroregional strategies** like the **Baltic Sea Strategy** into broader EU funding programs, raising awareness, and facilitating **connections** between the two ecosystems to encourage more successful applications for **Creative Europe** and similar programs.

Marta Jimenez Pumares (EAC) responded to Franziska's earlier point and acknowledged that **Creative Europe currently lacks a mechanism to connect projects directly to macroregional strategies** (e.g., the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region). She confirmed that this is an important gap that could be addressed to **enhance the effectiveness and coherence of regional funding**.

Marta Jimenez Pumares suggested that **raising awareness of macroregional strategies among Creative Europe project leaders**, especially at the **application stage**, could significantly improve alignment. By ensuring that lead partners are informed about these strategies and their relevance, **projects could consciously align or connect with macroregional priorities**, thereby contributing more directly to EU cohesion goals.

She noted that the timing is appropriate, as the **Creative Europe programme is currently undergoing evaluation**. She proposed to include this issue as part of the **feedback and recommendations** for future improvements in the program's design and implementation.

Emphasis was placed on the need for **better communication and structured outreach**, enabling stakeholders to understand the **value of integrating macroregional strategies** into their cultural or creative projects.

Marta Jimenez Pumares highlighted that **many stakeholders might not even be aware that this opportunity exists**, thus missing the chance to align with broader EU frameworks.

Tom Schumacher supported Marta's suggestion, noting that the **discussion highlighted a key issue** in bridging EU-level funding programs with macroregional initiatives. He underlined the **importance of communication and visibility**, and reiterated that such integration would **help regional projects feel more connected to EU priorities** and strategic frameworks.

Marta will **relay the feedback** to the relevant teams as part of the ongoing **Creative Europe programme evaluation**.



Marta Jimenez-Pumares highlighted that there is **growing interest** in **regional dimensions** within **Creative Europe**, with particular attention being given to the **outermost regions**, which have traditionally been overlooked. She mentioned that initiatives like the **European Capitals of Culture** are increasingly recognizing the need for **long-lasting impacts** post-event. For example, a project in the **Danube Macroregional Strategy** is working to create **multiannual effects** after the special cultural year, demonstrating more focus on **regional aspects**. Marta noted that there is a **greater emphasis** on **regional connections**, though some of these efforts could still benefit from more awareness and integration.

Franziska Kapteina expressed concerns about the lack of integration between **EU-level frameworks** and **macroregional strategies**. She pointed out that there seems to be **insufficient awareness** among EU-level initiatives about the existence of **macroregional strategies**, such as the **European Bauhaus** and others. Franziska mentioned that if these frameworks were more aware of the **macroregional strategies**, they could potentially better integrate them into their initiatives, which would help **connect** projects to these **regional priorities** more effectively.

Marta Jimenez-Pumares acknowledged the points raised by Franziska. She emphasized that there has been more focus on **regional strategies** in the past few years, particularly with **Creative Europe**, but there's still room for improvement.

She suggested **organizing info sessions** where different EU stakeholders, such as **Creative Europe desks**, could be informed about the **macroregional strategies**. These sessions could help improve understanding and collaboration between **macroregional initiatives** and EU funding opportunities.

Tom Schumacher supported Marta's idea of organizing **information sessions**. He highlighted that there are already similar initiatives underway in **structural funds**, such as the **ESF**, to introduce **macroregional strategies** to relevant technical committees at the EU level. Tom agreed that such sessions would be a **great idea** and could lead to more effective integration between **EU-level funding** and **macroregional strategies**.

Blagovestka Riiser emphasized the importance of **regional networks**. She noted that such networks could benefit from better **communication** and collaboration. She extended an **invitation** for Marta to attend the **Macroregional Strategy Days** organized by **DG Regio**, where all relevant line **DGs** will meet and engage with **macroregional strategies**.



This event will provide a platform for **cultural stakeholders** to interact with EU bodies and learn how to better connect with **regional priorities**.

**Blagovestka Riiser (REGIO)** emphasized the **importance of macroregional strategies** and how beneficial it would be for stakeholders to learn more about them. She mentioned that **regional cooperation** is crucial and that **networks** and ecosystems within regions need to be utilized more effectively. She reiterated the point that there's no disadvantage to focusing on specific **geographical areas** and that the collaboration in **macroregional networks** should be leveraged for better outcomes.

**Franziska Kapteina** highlighted that **DG Regio** has actively promoted macroregional strategies, but cultural funding programs might not always be aware of their existence. She suggested that **funding programs**, especially **Creative Europe** and **Horizon Europe**, should be more informed about the **macroregional strategies** and be invited to events like the **Macroregional Strategies Days**. This way, they could integrate the **strategic goals** of these regions into their funding priorities.

**Tom Schumacher** agreed with Franziska's suggestions and stressed that it would be valuable to organize **extra sessions** specifically for programs like **Creative Europe** to connect them with **macroregional strategies**. He emphasized the need for better **communication** and **exchanges** between these different frameworks and initiatives.

Tom also proposed organizing a session specifically for the **EUSBSR PA Culture** group to introduce **macroregional strategies** to the respective **funding programs**.

**Magdalena Kleszczewska** introduced the **InnoCulture Conference**, a key event for **Baltic Sea region actors** in the cultural sector. The purpose of the conference is to enhance networking, encourage **transnational cooperation**, and foster connections between cultural organizations across the region.

The **2025 edition** of the **InnoCulture Conference** will be held in **Tallinn** on **November 19th and 20th**. The theme will focus on "**Strengthening the skills pipeline for CCI: fostering entrepreneurship and cross-sector collaboration.**"

She invited **Marta** and other colleagues to attend the conference, emphasizing that it would be a great opportunity to connect with stakeholders and potentially join a **steering group meeting** that may be held **back-to-back** with the conference



## 7. AOB

### Next Steps and Action Items

1. **Rules of Procedure:** A proposal to amend the **Rules of Procedure** was discussed, particularly concerning the **silence procedure**, which could be shortened from **10 working days** to **5 working days**.
2. **Next Steering Group Meeting:**
  - The next steering group meeting is tentatively scheduled to be **back-to-back** with the **InnoCulture Conference** in **Tallinn**, November 2025.
  - **Kadri Jauram** will be consulted regarding the logistics, and further details will be shared with members soon.

**Magdalena Kleszczewska** informed the group that **links to presentations and reports** mentioned during the meeting will be sent out by **tomorrow or Monday**.

**Franziska Kapteina** thanked everyone for their **active participation** and commented that the meeting was productive and informative.