TEH101 CONFERENCE: POLICY BRIEFS

TRANS EUROPE HALLES



Writers: Emmanuel Vergès, Kitti Baracsi, Leonardo Delmonte, Rita Delgado Correcher and Zuzana Ernst
Contributors from TEH Coordination Office: Erika Haxhi and Rita Palma
Photos: Caroline Dutrey, Olga Zaporozhets and Pierre Gondard
Layout design: Emma Palojärvi

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Co-funded by the European Union

SWEDISH ARTS COUNCIL

Introduction

What conversations are happening in the network around advocacy and policy? What can we learn from the discussions taking place among TEH members and how can these conversations inform our work towards the decision-makers?

These policy briefs are Trans Europe Halles' way of capturing policy inputs from our network, with a focus on the conversations that are happening in our annual TEH meetings. The briefs are intended to inform and support the network's ongoing policy development and advocacy efforts, while giving members a way to reflect on the things that are talked about within the network.

The briefs grew out of the meetings and selected sessions held in TEH101 Conference in Marseille, France in April 2026. The briefs were made by members, for members: by people facilitating or observing the sessions and written in a digestible way for the TEH network's collective use.

While the briefs are targeted towards the members and the network's collective learning, they also inform the development of a broader policy proposal targeted to the decision-makers at the European, national and local level.

The process continues beyond the proposal. As part of TEH's Common Spaces project (2025–2028), the briefs are also feeding into TEH's policy strategy as well as into the wider strategy process of strengthening TEH as a Policy Network.

The aim is ultimately simple: to listen to what is already being discussed, to capture it, and to bring it further within the network and beyond.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to sharing their ideas, thoughts, and reflections in Marseille and to the writers who translated the learnings, threads, and discussions into these policy briefs: Rita Delgado Correcher and Leonardo Delmonte, Kitti Baracsi, Emmanuel Vergès and Zuzana Ernst.



POLICY BRIEF

Opening panel

Living within planetary limits: growing, not scaling

Emmanuel Vergès

Trans Europe Halles opened its 101st meeting with different voices: the one of a scientist, an artistic mediator, and a cultural professional. Voices that proposed to answer how can artistic practices and collectives enable us to live better on Earth. In La Friche Belle de Mai, this question resonated with the story of this “territory of art” that is La Friche and the cooperation projects made there: with the artists, the people, and the cultural structures.

Narrative: crisis equation solved by TEH cultural centres

The image of the Earth from the cosmos is not the Earth where we live + We do not live on the globe, we live on a thin, fragile critical zone + No soil, no food, no society + The limit is not the problem. The limit is the revelation + Language shapes the future + Culture is having a future

= Culture is a critical zone that makes invisible links visible, and allows us to grow, not to scale

Reflection and policy implications

1. The human scale: working in the “first kilometre”

The Earth seen from the cosmos is not the Earth we live on. We live on a thin layer of life on the planet's surface. This layer is not just a surface, and we must consider its depth, what we call the “zone critique” (critical zone), to think seriously about our conditions of habitability. Or, to put it differently: "No soil, no food, no society".

Intentions: The lived territory, not the globally imagined territory.

Habitability plays out in the "first kilometre”, and this redesigns public action. The term "first kilometre" comes from the logistics and networks sector: It defines the ability to deliver a product or service to a final recipient, locally. It is easy to see what it means for home parcel delivery or internet access. Applied to culture and cultural policy, it engages us to look for how a cultural project or an artistic initiative reaches its intended audience and, more generally, how a cultural project is carried out within the local resources: local people, professionals and institutions, artists, environment... In this sense, a cultural project is not only delivered but is built with and for its audiences and its territory.

TEH's cultural centres have been established to operate within this "first kilometre". It is the "human scale". It is what enables us to connect with one another. It is not a concept. It is a reality. Then, when we act in this "first kilometre", public policies can't no longer "descend" onto the territory, but are built from it and with it. The real link of TEH centres in abandoned and then reactivated spaces makes them key actors in this "first kilometre".

Tension: the concept of habitability is intimidating. Local actors do not always know how to position themselves in relation to it, or fear misunderstanding it. Local-scale action requires a sense of ownership that is not yet in place. Even as the concept is gaining institutional recognition.

European policy link: There is a structural contradiction between the mobility KPIs of the Green Deal – the European Union's comprehensive growth strategy and legislative roadmap to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 – and the local grassroot model that real transition requires. We have learned to scale up our local project, to reproduce and amplify them, to imagine projects as commons. We have hardly learned how grow. To scale is not to grow. These are two radically different logics. Scaling duplicates a model while ignoring the resources that make it work. Growing means transforming by taking roots, in a territory, in a community.

2. Connection: building knowledge together

Each different scientific discipline walks its own path. They do not cross each other to create new knowledges and practices. They no longer speak to each other. They no longer make culture together. Cultural structures have been accumulating knowledge for decades, and academic institutions struggle to recognise that. This epistemic fracture is not a communication problem: it is one of the root causes of our collective inability to act at the right scale.

Intention: cultural centres are spaces capable to cross and link different knowledges, practices, ideas, projects, people... without hierarchy. They are neither an academic laboratory, nor public institution, nor market. They are places of trust, proximity, and encounter between forms of knowledge that meet nowhere else. They produce the capacity to imagine and act differently. They produce their knowledges and develop their strategies from their daily experiences. We can call them "habitability skills": active listening, collective description, mediation, and relational and emotional competences.

Tension: ecological crises are mainly invisible. Soil erosion, biodiversity loss, dependency systems, these are not easily seen, like the loss of craft knowledge and practice. Collective description is not enough. We also need to make perceptible what escapes ordinary perception.

European policy link: *A Habitability Lab*, bringing together research networks, university labs and cultural structures, could be the next step of the "living lab" to explore and reshape the function of cultural spaces, with the different concepts of transitions. A space to search and make, such ideas are captured by academic logic.



3. Celebrating and practising: exercising every day

Daily care as a founding ingredient of transition: cooking together, welcoming, cleaning, offering water, making things together. These gestures are the basics of care for something beyond oneself. They are repeated every day as a discipline, as a way of approaching the toxic world, not as a problem to be solved, but as a living system to be understood, respected, and loved (reference to Miyazaki's work, as noted in the opening speech). These daily practices could be seen as a sort of practical magic, a way of doing simple practical cultural and collective tasks, but with a caring or human intention. With something more than just the task. Something that transcends the task, that goes beyond the task.

Intention: we need to change the conditions in which we act. Not what we do, but how and with whom. What cultural centres are doing every day, through practice, through how they welcome, how they open, how they name things. They are already making the future. Artistic mediation allows different publics to engage according to their own capacities: everyone finds a way in, no one is excluded by the level of discourse. This is a collective institutional transformation, not an individual posture, carried by imagination and narrative.

"The future is shaped by the language we are practising now. Not the language we might speak. The language we act." – Ibrahim Nehme

Tension: the risk of reducing this practice to an individual posture rather than a collective institutional transformation.

European policy link: Care and relational work remain invisible in all European cultural evaluation frameworks, while they constitute the core of what TEH member centres do.

4. Instituting: changing the rules of the game

Cultural centres as translation zones between science, lived experience, and politics. They are not just spaces of representation, but active interfaces where actors who no longer speak to each other, are able to rediscover a common language. Cultural centres have been translating sets of practices into new rules of collective functioning. Cultural centres institute.

Intention: Cultural sites have developed responses over the past 40 years by supporting economic and other crises. They produce spaces of social regeneration, community, care, and self-cultivation. By remaining connected to territory, communities, living systems, environments, and institutions, they make the invisible perceptible. This translation function is political. It reconfigures the "first kilometre of public action", where abstract decisions become concrete conditions of life, in all their dimensions. This translation function is a form of diplomacy with one's environment in its globality.

Tension: change is recent and fragile. Suspicion toward hybrid knowledge, interdisciplinary practice, and sciences that question growth has lasted many years. It is time to listen to these watchkeepers who help make the critical zone fertile.

European policy link: Cultural democracy in Council of Europe policies. The role of cultural centres in rebuilding democratic bonds — a growing theme in the CERV and Creative Europe 2027-2030 frameworks.

Proposals

1. Focusing on the distinction between "growth" and "scale up"

Bring the growing / scaling distinction to DG EAC – the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, which manages policies and funding programs like Erasmus+ and Creative Europe – as a structuring argument for the Creative Europe 2027-2030 advocacy: cultural networks are not distribution operators at scale, they are living organisms that grow through rootedness. This distinction is not merely semantic. It rests on documented examples, measurable temporalities, and a logic of development radically different from what current indicators capture. This distinction allows to transform evaluation policy.

2. Developing an impact framework based on lived territory and long-term temporalities

Develop a shared impact framework based on lived territory and long-term temporalities: quality of a collective inquiry, transformation of local dependency relationships, the continuity of care practices, and the duration of a community engagement. Time should not be seen merely as an implementation constraint, it is an indicator in itself. Living processes take at least ten years; an evaluation framework that only measures what happens in eighteen months does not see what cultural centres actually do. TEH is well positioned to carry this advocacy, with concrete examples and scientific credibility, to national and European funders.

3. Developing a toolkit of habitability skills

Co-develop with members a toolkit of habitability skills – collective inquiry methods, mediation tools, relational and emotional competences – shared internally with member centres and externally with local public agents. This need was expressed explicitly in the room in Marseille. It should not go unaddressed. This toolkit is both an internal capacity-building tool for the network and a lever for institutional legitimacy within local authorities and European institutions.

4. Engaging in prospective work on the visible and the invisible

TEH is undertaking forward-looking work on what cultural centres are already doing but which policymakers have yet to recognise, and on what they could introduce that current regulations do not yet provide for. Cultural work becomes civic work, in which the functioning of a neighbourhood, a city or a community is reshaped.

This forward-looking work takes two complementary forms:

- A short manifesto on the central shift: from content production to the creation of conditions.
- Complemented by a light-touch observatory of invisible practices, driven by members, documenting and making comparable practices of care, ritual and hospitality, as a tool for mutual recognition and advocacy.

The development of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) and Creative Europe frameworks for the post-2027 cycle involves a massive structural reorganization under the European Commission's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 proposal.

5. Experimenting with the representation of non-human actors

Experiment in volunteer member centres with forms of representation of non-human actors – soils, water, ecosystems – in decision-making processes. Make this a documented and shared laboratory within the network, which could be positioned as an innovation in cultural governance with European institutions. Several cultural centres are already working in this direction. It helps to make this work visible, comparable and politically significant.

Glossary

Critical zone / zone critique

The thin, fragile layer of the Earth between unweathered bedrock and the lower atmosphere – the habitat of all living beings and human societies. It is neither soil alone, nor ecosystems alone, nor groundwater alone: it is all of these in constant interaction, across timescales ranging from seconds to geological time. The critical zone is not visible from space. It is not the image of the globe. It is what we actually live on.
Source: Jérôme Gaillardet – TEH101 Conference opening panel

Habitability / habitabilité

The set of conditions – ecological, social, cultural, and political – that make a territory liveable for its human and non-human inhabitants. Habitability is not a technical standard (as in building regulations) but a political and cultural question: what territory do we actually live on, and with whom? Without a shared understanding of a territory, no shared politics is possible.
Source: Chloé Latour – TEH101 Conference opening panel

Habitability skills / compétences d'habitabilité

A set of practical competences that enable individuals and collectives to investigate, describe, and act upon the territory they inhabit. As developed by the Université des Terrestres and S-composition, these include: active listening, collective description of dependencies (human and non-human), artistic mediation, relational and emotional competences, and the capacity to make invisible ecological realities perceptible.
Source: Université des Terrestres / S-composition

First kilometre / premier kilomètre

The local scale at which cultural action reaches its intended community – through local people, local institutions, local environments and local knowledge. Borrowed from the logistics and networks sector (where it defines the ability to deliver a service to a final recipient at a local level), the concept applied to cultural policy means that public action can no longer "descend" onto the territory but must be built from it. TEH Member centres, established in specific places and communities, are structural actors of this first kilometre.
Source: Rapport du Conseil d'État (fr), 2023.

Scaling vs. growing / scaler vs. grandir

Two radically different logics of development, and evaluation of the public policy impact. Scaling (scaler) means duplicating a model – reproducing, amplifying, optimising – without regard for the local resources and relationships that make it work. Growing (grandir) means transforming by taking root: in a territory, in a community, in a set of relationships that cannot be replicated elsewhere. TEH Member centres are organisms that grow. They are not platforms that scale.
Source: Emmanuel Vergès

Translation zone / zone de traduction

A space where actors from different disciplines, sectors, or knowledge traditions – who no longer speak to each other – are able to find a common language and act together. Cultural centres function as translation zones when they bring together scientists, artists, citizens, public agents, and local communities around a shared investigation of their territory. They do not simply host these actors: they actively mediate between them, making each form of knowledge legible to the others.
Source: TEH101 Conference opening panel

Practical magic / magie pragmatique

The set of daily care practices – cooking together, welcoming, cleaning, offering water, making things together – through which cultural centres create the conditions of collective life. Called "practical magic" because these gestures appear simple or mundane, but carry an intention that goes beyond the task: they approach the world not as a problem to be solved, but as a living system to be understood, respected, and sustained. This is not a metaphor – it is a discipline and a method.
Source: Mieke Renders – TEH101 Conference keynot speaker

Habitability Lab

A long-term, hybrid research and action space that brings together scientists, artists, cultural workers, and citizens to investigate the habitability conditions of a specific territory. Habitability Labs combine scientific inquiry (earth systems, ecology, soil, water) with artistic mediation and citizen investigation, producing both new knowledge and new forms of collective action. They are designed as permanent infrastructures – not project-based – operating on the timescales required by ecological processes (ten years or more).
See: OZCAR (Observatoires de la Zone Critique, Applications et Recherche)



POLICY BRIEF

Building climate nests: cultural centres as spaces of care and refuge

Rita Delgado Correcher and
Leonardo Delmonte

Introduction: from climate awareness to climate experience

Climate change is increasingly reshaping the everyday realities of cultural spaces. Heat waves, flooding, water scarcity, and changing weather patterns are no longer distant environmental concerns, but operational realities affecting infrastructures, programming, and communities.

The workshop Building Climate Nests: Cultural Centres as Spaces of Care and Refuge explored how cultural centres can respond to these challenges. Starting from the idea of the “climate nest”: a space that offers refuge, care and connection during periods of environmental stress, the workshop explored the role cultural centres can play in supporting adaptation at the local level.

Many cultural centers already provide forms of hospitality, social support, and community infrastructure through their buildings, public spaces, and programmes. The session combined embodied practice, situated examples, and facilitated discussions to explore how these existing capacities might contribute to climate resilience.

The activity also builds on the work of the TEH N.E.S.T. Hub (Network of Ecological and Social Transitions), evolving from the exchanges in TEH99 Conference in Sofia and TEH100 Camp Meeting in Riga where members developed a shared vocabulary around new ecologies, biophilia, maintenance, interspecies relations, and cultural centers as climate refuges. In particular, it draws on the discussions that led to the first draft of the N.E.S.T. Maintenance Charter, which explores maintenance as a form of care, stewardship and ecological transition.

The workshop combined four interconnected moments: an embodied climate adaptation exercise facilitated by Pluto, TEH member from Valencia, Spain; a collective reflection on lived experiences of heat, exposure and refuge; the sharing of situated practices from cultural spaces; and a policy-oriented discussion on how these practices could inform local adaptation frameworks.

This methodology is relevant because it makes the activity transferable: it links somatic perception, local knowledge, peer learning, and policy reflection rather than treating climate adaptation as a purely technical issue.



Starting from the body: an embodied approach to climate adaptation

The workshop opened with an embodied exercise facilitated by Pluto. Participants were invited to imagine moving through a summer day in a Mediterranean city: leaving home, experiencing increasing heat and exposure, searching for relief, and eventually arriving at a cultural centre transformed into a place of refuge.

Climate information was introduced progressively within the exercise rather than presented as isolated facts. Beginning from the body generated several reflections that continued throughout the discussions:

- adaptation is experienced differently depending on bodies and circumstances;
- care requires infrastructures rather than intentions alone;
- refuge depends on maintenance, accessibility, and collective responsibility.

The embodied approach also highlighted that climate adaptation is shaped by unequal bodily and social conditions: age, health, disability, housing quality, income, access to transport, care responsibilities, and familiarity with public services all shape how people experience heat, exposure, and refuge.

Emerging discussions: situated experiences and shared challenges

Participants shared experiences from different territories where climate change is already affecting cultural practices and infrastructures. Discussions moved between heat waves, flooding, changing programming conditions, and the limitations of existing buildings.

A recurring question emerged: what role can cultural centres play within these changing realities?

Examples ranged from opening community spaces during periods of extreme heat, to creating shaded areas, improving access to water, planting trees, and identifying naturally cooler areas within buildings. Participants also shared experiences of adapting programming schedules, rethinking the use of public space, and responding to increasingly frequent extreme weather events.

Across different contexts, discussions highlighted a common challenge: how to balance the needs of local communities, cultural programming, and climate adaptation within often limited physical and financial constraints.

Concrete examples connected the discussion to practices already being developed across the TEH network: nature-based rituals and ecological hospitality initiatives by Pluto in Valencia, Spain; landscape-based work on green and blue infrastructures by Wunderkammer/Basso Profilo in Ferrara, Italy; heatwave hospitality experiments at La Friche la Belle de Mai in Marseille, France; Campo Teatrale in Milan, Italy, which promotes sustainable mobility by rewarding audiences who reach the theatre by bicycle; WUK in Vienna, Austria, where green roofs have been implemented and the restoration of the building intentionally preserved the existing Virginia creeper as a living second skin; and Bloom in Mezzago, Italy, whose activities are embedded within a tree-rich environment that contributes to local biodiversity, shade and ecological awareness.

Together, these examples illustrate how cultural centres are already functioning as climate refuges, ecological infrastructures, and places of care within their territories. Rather than relying on exceptional interventions, they demonstrate how everyday practices of maintenance, hospitality, ecological stewardship and community engagement can strengthen local resilience in the face of climate change.

Key themes emerging from discussions

Cultural centres as places of refuge

Participants described cultural centres as spaces that can provide practical support during periods of environmental stress. Beyond hosting cultural activities, many centres already offer gathering spaces, shade, water, social connection, and access to information.

Several examples highlighted ongoing efforts to intentionally strengthen this role. At La Friche Belle de Mai, for example, current work is exploring how parts of the site can become more welcoming and accessible during heatwaves, while remaining embedded within the centre's cultural mission.

Maintenance as adaptation

The discussions suggest that climate refuges should not be understood merely as temporary emergency shelters. They require everyday maintenance: keeping spaces accessible, repairing and adapting buildings, caring for shaded and planted areas, sustaining relationships with neighbours, and clarifying responsibilities across staff, communities, and public authorities.

Biophilia and relationships with the living environment

The workshop also opened a more cultural dimension of adaptation: the need to cultivate biophilic relationships with local ecosystems. Shade, water, trees, and cooler spaces are not only technical assets; they can become part of a wider cultural shift from biophobia to biophilia, supporting emotional connection, ecological awareness and care for more-than-human life.

Adaptation requires participation

A recurring theme was that adaptation is not only about modifying buildings. Several participants emphasised the importance of involving neighbours, residents, and local communities in decisions about how spaces are used and transformed.

Examples included co-design processes, community gardens, and dedicated staff roles focused on strengthening relationships with surrounding communities. These experiences suggest that successful adaptation depends as much on governance and participation as on infrastructure.

Unequal capacities to adapt

Participants noted that responses to climate change often assume access to resources, mobility, and flexibility. However, not everyone can leave overheated cities, travel to cooler locations, or access alternative spaces during periods of environmental stress. Adaptation therefore emerged not only as an environmental challenge but also as a question of accessibility and inclusion.





Policy implications

The discussions suggest that climate adaptation should be understood as both an infrastructural and a social challenge. Key priorities emerging from the workshop include:

1. recognising the role that cultural centres can play as local places of refuge during climate-related disruptions
2. creating support mechanisms for adaptation within the cultural sector
3. supporting low-tech and place-based solutions, including shade, trees, water access, and passive cooling
4. encouraging participatory approaches that involve local communities in adaptation processes.
5. recognising cultural centers within local and regional climate adaptation plans as complementary infrastructures of care and resilience
6. funding maintenance, staffing, and community engagement as part of adaptation, not only capital investments in buildings
7. supporting cultural centers to document the social, environmental, and public-health value they generate during climate-related disruptions

Next steps for Trans Europe Halles

Internal

- document and share practical examples already being tested by members, such as climate refuge initiatives, passive cooling measures, community gardens, and participatory governance approaches

- facilitate peer exchange around challenges, successes, and lessons learned

- develop a toolkit of adaptable strategies that cultural centers can apply in their own contexts

- collect short case studies from N.E.S.T. Hub members demonstrating how climate refuge practices, low-tech cooling, biophilic programming, and participatory maintenance can be adapted across different territories.

External

- strengthen links with wider climate resilience and adaptation initiatives

- advocate for the recognition of cultural centres as valuable community assets during periods of environmental stress

- contribute practical experiences from the cultural sector to broader climate policy discussions

- position cultural centres in conversations with municipalities, civil protection actors, public health services, and urban climate adaptation offices

- advocate for their inclusion in climate adaptation plans as distributed, community-based infrastructures of care rather than only as cultural venues.



Methodological note

The workshop was facilitated by the coordinators of the N.E.S.T. Hub Leonardo Delmonte and Hugo Thiers, together with José Martí Sánchez and Rita Delgado Correcher from Pluto and Yann Loric and Esther Destrés from La Friche Belle de Mai, bringing together perspectives from cultural management, ecological transition, community engagement, and climate adaptation practices. Participants represented a diverse range of cultural centres within the Trans Europe Halles network, contributing experiences from urban, peri-urban and rural contexts across Europe. The workshop originally planned to conclude with a collective synthesis. In practice, discussions developed with unexpected depth, and there was insufficient time to return fully to plenary.

Rather than representing a limitation, this highlighted the complexity of the topic and the value of creating space for exchange between practitioners working in different contexts.

The absence of a final plenary synthesis should also be understood as a methodological finding: climate adaptation requires formats that allow enough time for embodiment, local storytelling, disagreement, translation, and collective sense-making.

Building climate nests therefore means moving beyond emergency responses and recognising cultural centres as long-term infrastructures of care, maintenance and ecological transition within their territories.

In this perspective, climate adaptation becomes not only a technical challenge, but a cultural practice of collective care, ecological stewardship, and long-term coexistence within the permacrisis.

3

POLICY BRIEF

Need for a cultural flood?

Flood Embassy

Kitti Baracsi



“Flood is a profound change that can leave a completely different landscape.”
– participant of the Flood Embassy speculative workshop

This policy brief explores the transversal and critical role and potential of cultural centres in the ecological transformation, based on the experiences of the Flood Embassy speculative workshop held by Kitti Baracsi from Periferias dibujadas on 19 April, during the TEH101 Conference “Imagining within limits: cultural centres and planetary boundaries” in Marseille. The event emphasised the importance of creative and cultural centres’ work, at the intersection of ecological transition, public policy, cultural production models, and relationship with local territories. It recognised the double responsibility of cultural centres: inform, adapt, but also to drive transformation, by generating alternative narratives and desirable imaginaries, as well as connecting with audiences in a different way, sparking new ways of thinking, living and organising society.

Building on the workshop’s experience, as well as the wider reflections of the event, this policy brief seeks to answer two interrelated questions:

1. How do the emotional, social, economic, and political landscapes change if we locate the river in the centre of them?

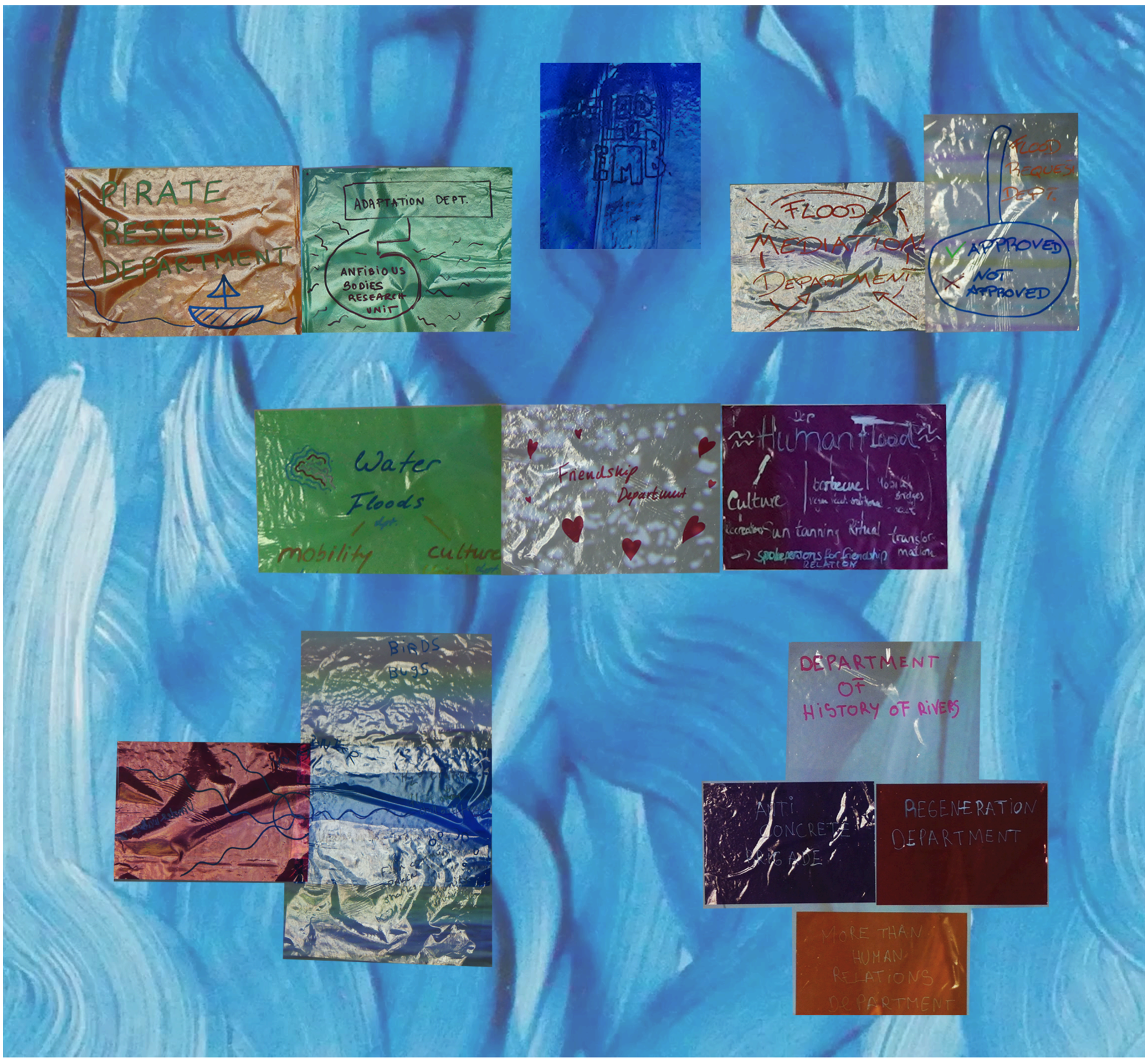
2. What does thinking and feeling through the river reveal about the role of cultural centres when it comes to "imagining within limits”?

The session built on the RiVER-another look at the city project's experiences. This is an itinerary project, being realised since 2024 across multiple locations in Europe and Latin-America. The project’s main proposition is to reimagine cities from the rivers’ point of view and as a result of this, create a multimodal glossary that contains multiple creative formats. This glossary is inspired by ecopoetics, that is poetics that incorporate an ecological perspective, therefore creates imaginative community art, building on co-creators' lived experiences that centres nature, and more specifically, rivers.

During this workshop, performing an imaginary institution – the Flood Embassy – participants imagined alternative pasts, presents, and futures, through the river.

First, through a storymapping exercise called “Interweaving experiences”, participants shared river stories. Almost every participant had some significative stories related to a river, and many of them already brought up questions about the impact of human activities on nature.

After defining what is a flood by drawing, participants were asked to imagine themselves as flood, served as an invitation to think about the flood as not only the water, but the human presence and societies we build, and based on this idea they received the following instruction: “Imagine an institution, the flood embassy, concerned about all the floods, both made by rivers and humans!” At last, they created concrete proposals negotiating human and natural floods.



Cultural centres and climate action

The MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration affirms that culture must play a central role in climate action. Culture holds a potential to shift the climate conversation, focusing on shared values, collective memory and community resilience. Another important aspect is to deepen our relationship with the natural environment, encouraging stewardship. The European Commission Report "Stormy Times. Nature and humans: Cultural courage for change" similarly highlights the role of the cultural sector. The European Commission's current objective is to develop a more strategic approach to cultural policy, ensuring that culture is woven into policy making across the board, but how exactly could cultural centres play a role to induce a profound change in policies and their implementation?

The following policy proposals build on the proposals made by participants as part the imaginary Flood Embassy, pointing towards more generic considerations.

1. Being together

- **Proposal 1:** Create a "Friendship department" between human and non-human floods.
- **Proposal 2:** "Facilitate, communicate" between humans and rivers.

Cultural spaces have a significant role in building social cohesion and community building. Thinking about environmental issues through experiencing a territory – like participants sharing their river stories – has the potential to activate affective connections through personal memories and desires. From an ecofeminist point of view, art and culture can expose parallels between the historical oppression of women and the exploitation of the earth, appealing to shared stories of suffering.

But what if we give voice to non-human actors? Many of the proposals formulated by the participants organically point towards the need for mediation, translation or even friendship between seemingly conflicting interests of humans and nature. The right of nature concept attributes rights to nature within human legal frameworks, and environmental personhood extends legal personhood to nature. At the same time, many indigenous worldviews do not distinguish between nature and humans as subjects, or create a relationship built on stewardship with nature, something the workshop itself aimed to experiment with. Friendship understood as the foundation of both ethical and political life has a long history across philosophical thinking and might brings us on a similar, yet distinct road, cultivating a friendship, capable of bridging differences, practice forgiveness and restore trust.

The image of "Friendship Department" therefore could potentially represent cultural centres as bridges between the human and non-human, as well as the local territories and policy-making. Cultural centres indeed, have an enormous experience in "being together", building understanding across differences. There is a great potential in extending this practice beyond humans, and rethink and expand the subjects of cultural centres consider their audience and collaborators. As Silvia Federici affirms, "No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life and our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed, if commoning has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject." In these terms, being together is key in constructing different relations to each other and to nature. "This is how we must understand the slogan "no commons without community." But 'community' has to be intended(...)as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and of responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals." (Federici, 2018, p.110)

2. Experimentation

- **Proposal 3:** "Every cultural centre should have a rainwater collection system."
- **Proposal 4:** "No ownership."
- **Proposal 5:** Set up a "Participatory council."

Cultural centres function as important nodes in local ecosystems to co-create prototypes in response to social and environmental challenges. These experimentations have a great potential to be shared and replicated, be they collective intelligence or infrastructure technologies. Prototypes are as "safe spaces" to experiment with regenerative behaviors and distributive models. If we look at cultural centres as spaces of prefigurative politics, - where we can embody and practice the social structures and values of our ideal society - these spaces rehearse solutions every day through making a change in citizen attitudes and the learning of collaboration and technical skills. Scaling up responses to climate change need to centre these community learning processes.

A degrowth world could provide more space for meaningful creation, as Jason Hickel famously affirms: "with more free time people would be able to have fun, enjoy conviviality with loved ones, cooperate with neighbors, care for friends and relatives, cook healthy food, exercise and enjoy nature, thus rendering unnecessary the patterns of consumption that are driven by time scarcity. (Hickel, 2019) This is a utopia, cultural centres seem to be able create in the present - with all its fragility -: an abundance of people, ideas, resources that go against the logics of consumption. Therefore, in order to create spaces of experimentation, it is important to enable cultural spaces to do more and better of building a degrowth world.

3. Radical imagination

→ **Proposal 6:** “Feel, see and hear floods as a member of a vulnerable community.”

→ **Proposal 7:** “Give open spaces to respond to necessities.”

Art and culture holds a potential to create visions of post-capitalist futures. Cultural centres can play an enormous role in policy-making through the power of imagination and world creation. Participatory cultural policy-making and strong civil-society involvement in cultural governance help broaden who participates in public life and whose narratives and identities are visible in democratic discourse (UNESCO 2022).

The Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries (the Doughnut) offers a visual monitor of progress towards the goal of meeting the needs of all people within the means of the living planet. Between these two sets of boundaries lies a doughnut-shaped space that is both ecologically safe and socially just: a space in which humanity can thrive. The Doughnut was elaborated by Kate Raworth, but later turned into a global community and movement. It is about reshaping the values, norms, and relationships that shape economic life, which requires changing the mindsets and stories that guide behavior, i.e. the need to create alternative narratives.

The workshop showed the enormous potential of using collective intelligence to redefined concepts that are central to how we think about city-nature relations, as well as to create situated yet imaginative moments to connect with our territories, very similar to how indigenous knowledge systems flow across generations and create relations with territories, through storytelling and ceremony.

Inspired by longtermism, and with a focus on protecting future generations, cultural centres can create radically different imaginaries and a necessary shift in thinking about planetary boundaries, dealing with future from a place of responsibility. It is important to create conditions in which cultural centres are recognised for their radical imagination work and its contribution to better futures.

Cultural flood (def.): A profound cultural change that can create a completely different landscape.



References and recommendations for further reading

Federici, S. (2018). Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons. pm Press.

Hickel, J. (2019). Degrowth: a theory of radical abundance. Real-world economics review, 87(19), 54-68.

Raworth, K. (2017). Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist. Chelsea Green Publishing

Doughnut Economics Action Lab https://doughnuteconomics.org/

Longtermism webpage https://longtermism.com/

Stormy Times. Nature and humans: Cultural courage for change
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2022). Re|shaping policies for creativity: Addressing culture as a global public good. UNESCO.

Ecopoetic glossary of urban hospitality. Slash platform, 2025.

4

POLICY BRIEF

Two beats per minute

Listening in the Deep: Echoes, relation, and the politics of slowing down

What if listening comes first? [1]

Zuzana Ernst

1 Adapted from the workshop and research text Two Beats per Minute: Listening in the Deep by Zuzana Ernst

At the TEH101 Conference in Marseille, France — centred around the theme “Imagining Within Limits: Cultural Centres and Planetary Boundaries” — cultural workers, artists, and organisers gathered to reflect on how cultural centres can respond to ecological, social, and economic limits while cultivating more sustainable, interconnected, and care-centred ways of working. Within this context, the workshop Two Beats per Minute invited participants into the slow temporalities of the deep ocean. The workshop engaged the conference theme through sensory awareness and shared collective practice for navigating social and ecological complexity. Inspired by whales — whose hearts slow to just two beats per minute when diving below the surface[2] — the session explored presence: asking what becomes audible when urgency is suspended and listening itself becomes a slowing down as a condition for perception, orientation, and relation. In the deep, sound travels differently: faster, farther, returning through scattered and distorted echoes that disorient human auditory perception. Listening here becomes immersive and embodied; we must orient not through certainty, but through sensing resonance and vibration. To listen deeply is to stay with what cannot immediately be grasped — to sense complexity rather than rush toward clarity. Thus, slowing down becomes a political practice.

Across Europe, cultural workers are navigating exhaustion, acceleration, institutional precarity, and increasing social polarisation. Diversity and inclusion are frequently invoked in policy language, while institutional rhythms often remain shaped by extraction, urgency, and productivity. Under these conditions, listening becomes shallow: fast consultation instead of transformation; representation instead of redistribution; perpetual project-making without structural change.

The workshop proposed deep listening as a discrimination-critical cultural practice: a way of sensing how we listen, whom we hear, and whom we continuously overhear — within institutions, collaborations, and our own artistic and cultural practices.

Listening is never neutral. As Indigenous scholar Dylan Robinson argues, dominant listening cultures are shaped by colonial histories and structures of power.[3] In Hungry Listening, Robinson describes forms of listening that consume difference as knowledge, aesthetic value, or institutional capital without reciprocity. Cultural institutions often reproduce this logic unconsciously: inviting marginalised voices into frameworks that remain structurally unchanged.

Similarly, Sara Ahmed reminds us that institutions frequently protect themselves through claims of neutrality, professionalism, or universality while continuing to centre the comfort of dominant groups.[4] Diversity becomes performative if institutions are unwilling to stay with discomfort long enough for transformation to occur.

[2] Inspired by Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals (AK Press, 2020).

[3] Dylan Robinson, Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies (University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

[4] Sara Ahmed, On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life (Duke University Press, 2012).

This is where slowing down matters. Slowing down not as inefficiency, but as a refusal of institutional habits that reward speed over accountability, clarity over complexity, and output over relation. It creates conditions for noticing unconscious bias, unequal participation, tokenism, and extractive collaboration practices that often remain invisible or unaddressed within accelerated production cycles.

To slow down together means creating enough time to notice:

- who speaks easily and who struggles to articulate;
- whose emotions are legitimised and whose are pathologised;
- who is repeatedly asked to educate institutions about racism, discrimination, or exclusion;
- who carries the invisible labour of care, translation, mediation, or conflict navigation.

The workshop's listening exercises explored these questions not through debate, but through embodied collective practice. Participants were invited to listen through heartbeat rhythms, breath, vibration, silence, movement, and touch. Practicing somatic listening together created moments of attunement[5] — to oneself, to others, and to the wider environment. By slowing down the nervous system and shifting attention toward bodily sensation and relation, the nature of conversation itself can begin to change. Reflections become less performative, less driven by quick opinion or expertise, and more rooted in presence, vulnerability, and attentive exchange.

One participant reflected that "this kind of experience helps men or boys to demasculinize," pointing toward how embodied listening practices can unsettle gendered expectations around emotional restraint, control, and performance. Another participant described the workshop as "a moment to release overwhelming feelings in body and mind," while another reflected that "it freed the space for new connections, in a nice and gentle way." During a collective humming and heartbeat exercise, participants noticed a shared impulse toward resonance: "people subconsciously want to harmonise together." Rather than settling into harmony, the practice invited to engage with the question how we might listen and relate across different rhythms without losing our own pulse. How can we stay attentive to tension and difference, while remaining connected to our own voice, limits, and needs, without collapsing into sameness or demanding coherence from one another?

Too often, European cultural collaboration still operates through implicit pressures to fit in: to remain agreeable, productive, and fast. Yet genuinely inclusive and discrimination-critical cultural work requires the capacity to remain with friction and diverging rhythms. Listening otherwise means resisting the urge to immediately resolve, explain, or contain difference.[6] It demands institutional unlearning, not only focusing on programming or representation; it must examine institutional listening habits themselves. What kinds of bodies, accents, affects, temporalities, and knowledges are considered legible within European cultural infrastructures? Which forms of participation are rewarded? Which are interrupted, ignored, or disciplined?

5 The workshop draws on practices of Deep Listening developed by Pauline Oliveros as well as somatic and relational listening methodologies.

6 Dylan Robinson, Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies (University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

The workshop explored how listening could become a collective rehearsal for (institutional) transformation. Not a technique for consensus-building, but a practice of accountability.

For Trans Europe Halles, this invites of deepening of understanding listening as a method and collective practice — one that shapes how we collaborate, make decisions, navigate difference, and remain accountable to one another.



Policy implications for TEH and European cultural policy

1. Recognise listening and care as cultural infrastructure

European cultural policy frameworks still prioritize visibility, innovation, measurable outputs, and growth. TEH's advocacy for funding structures that support relational, process-based, and care-centred practices opens space for recognising listening, trust-building, and collective reflection as essential forms of cultural work.

2. Embed discrimination-critical listening practices structurally

Listening methodologies have to begin from within organisational structures themselves — informing governance, leadership, facilitation, curatorial processes, and mediation — and from there ripple outward into member practices, collaborations, and wider cultural ecosystems. This includes trainings that support reflection around unconscious bias, anti-racism, extractive participation, institutional privilege, and conflict transformation.

3. Slow down institutional tempos

Many discriminatory dynamics are reproduced through speed: short funding cycles, overproduction, constant responsiveness, and little time for reflection, feedback, or repair. Within these conditions, cultural workers often move from project to project without enough space to process conflict, build trust, or question habitual ways of working. More sustainable rhythms — including longer-term collaborations, reflection periods, care structures, and process-oriented funding models — create greater possibility for attentiveness, accountability, and long-term relation-building.

4. Hold spaces for discomfort and non-coherence

Disagreement, uncertainty, grief, exhaustion, and friction are often treated as problems to solve quickly or signs that collaboration has failed. In practice, this can look like avoiding difficult conversations, rushing toward consensus, sidelining conflict, or expecting cultural workers to continue producing despite burnout and emotional strain. Creating structures that hold space for complexity might include facilitated reflection formats, longer feedback processes, mediation practices, or dedicated time for repair after conflict. Cultural democracy depends not only on participation, but on conditions that allow people to stay present with discomfort.

5. Strengthen alliances across ecological and social justice movements

Strengthening alliances across ecological and social justice movements creates space for connecting discrimination-critical cultural work with questions of interdependence, care, and more-than-human relation. Drawing from Black feminist, queer, decolonial, and ecological thought, this approach invites cultural networks to move beyond extractive models of collaboration toward practices grounded in mutual accountability, sustained attention, and collective responsibility.7 TEH is uniquely positioned to connect these conversations across cultural networks in Europe.

Sensing together

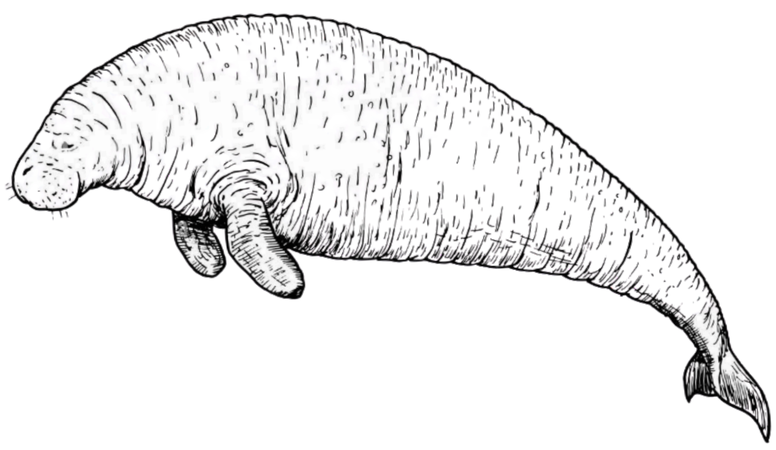
The whale does not listen alone. Across vast distances, whales send clicks, navigate through resonance, memory, and echoes — orienting through returning vibrations, relational sensing, and attentiveness to shifting conditions. Their survival depends on the ability to slow down, to conserve energy, to remain submerged long enough to perceive what cannot be grasped at the surface. Perhaps cultural networks are being asked to learn something similar.

In times shaped by reaction, urgency, and fragmentation, slowing down together becomes more than a gesture of care. It creates the conditions for another quality of attention: one capable of noticing what accelerated institutional and social rhythms often render inaudible — bias, exclusion, discomfort, grief, exhaustion, but also relation, interdependence, and collective possibility. It matters to ask what shapes our ways of listening.

This brief proposes listening as an ongoing practice of attunement and negotiating difference: staying connected to one another without demanding sameness, learning to remain with friction without immediately resolving it, and making space for voices, affects, and ways of knowing that often remain underheard.

For TEH, this opens not only a policy question, but a relational one: what kinds of artistic and institutional practices become possible when listening is understood as a shared responsibility? What shifts when cultural work makes room for slowness, reflection, embodied attention, and collective unlearning?

Let the time stretch. Let the echo return distorted. Let the body know before the mind explains. Let us pause — not to stop, but to sense together.




teh