

MYSTERY 79

# CULTURE ACTION EUROPE

## BEYOND THE OBVIOUS 2023 HANDLE WITH CARE: CULTURE FOR SOCIAL WELL-BEING

conference

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ELEFSINA, GREECE



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## Welcome to the 2023 edition of Beyond the Obvious | Handle with Care: Culture for Social Well-being Report



*Handle with Care | Culture for Social Well-being* was the 2023 edition of Culture Action Europe's Beyond the Obvious gathering. This international get-together invited practitioners, organisations and institutions, policy-makers, thinkers, researchers, activists and artists from the cultural, social and health sectors working on topics related to care, well-being, health and culture. *Handle with Care | Culture for Social Well-being* took place in Elefsina, Greece from 7 to 10 June 2023.

It was co-organised by Culture Action Europe, 2023 Eleusis European Capital of Culture, the CultureForHealth project and was co-financed by the European Union.

The multitude of crises our societies are facing today - including the climate and social injustice, wars, pandemic, economic and political upheavals in and beyond Europe - requires an urgent cultural response: a response rooted in care for the planet and communities, care for each other. To navigate these uncertainties, we are in search of a compass, a sense of direction towards a sustainable, democratic, caring future. The *Handle with Care | Culture for Social Well-being* gathering aimed to collectively explore the significance of care as an ethical and political obligation for our societies as well as the role culture and cultural professionals can play in this. Specifically, it discussed the evidence of the role of culture in improving health and well-being. How can culture and participation in the cultural life of communities nourish a sense of social and individual well-being?

The *Handle with Care | Culture for Social Well-being* gathering also had a special focus on the CultureForHealth project. This project implemented the EU Preparatory Action “Bottom-Up Policy Development for Culture & Well-being in the EU” with the ambition to trigger a true policy change in the EU by bringing health, cultural and social policies closer together. It aimed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience in the EU related to the role of culture for well-being and health, map the most relevant existing practices, carry out small-scale pilots and provide a set of policy recommendations.

Lars Ebert, Secretary General of Culture Action Europe (CAE): *“The 2023 edition of the Beyond the Obvious gathering focuses on urgent topics of well-being, mental, social and planetary health and ethics of care. While discussing the evidence of the role of culture in improving health and well-being, this international “unconference” also creates spaces to talk about the politics of well-living and care, including health, well-being and labour conditions in the cultural field. We are delighted to be debating care for community and care for the planet in Elefsina, which is the European Capital of Culture in 2023, a focal point of our (post-)industrial realities and birthplace of the ancient Greek myth of Demeter, goddess of agriculture and fertility of the land and her daughter, Persephone. A story about love, care and longing.”*

Michail Marmarinos, General Artistic Director (2023 Eleusis): *“We are delighted to be hosting “Handle with Care: Culture for Social Well-being” in the city of Elefsina, a place of cruel and mindless industrial development where the term ‘care’ has been violently renounced over decades. On the other hand, the critical contribution – the big challenge – of art and culture can operate as a constructive and inspiring current reconciliation of communities with those hurtful issues. Culture heals the earth and the soul. I would like here to reveal a direct aspect through a synonym to the word care: that one of respect. Respecting the planet, respecting nature, respecting the landscape, respecting the other. Culturally speaking, the unveiling of a synonym within the language may trigger connotations and as a consequence may expand the possibilities of consciousness and the reception of reality. On this occasion, I would like to welcome you in Elefsina, a latitude where the term care – as previously described – remains an open and dynamic challenge.”*

## **Καλώς ήλθατε!**

*Welcome from Michail Marmarinos, General Artistic Director (2023 Eleusis)*

I would like to welcome you in Elefsina, a latitude where the term care remains an open and dynamic challenge.

### **But, why Elefsina?**

Why was this particular city chosen to become a European Capital of Culture among so many others, so many striking and wealthier, larger ones? Elefsina was chosen despite the fact that it is the smallest city ever, chosen as a European City of Culture. It had not even one single indoor venue to offer as infrastructure!

Just 21 km to the west of Athens, Elefsina - or ELEVSIS, as her ancient name is - was one of the five sacred cities of Antiquity (along with Athens, Delphi, Olympia and Delos) and the unique religion centre of Athens and the rest of Greece. Later on, after the Romans invaded Greece, it became a universal religion centre, well known for the Eleusinian Mysteries where all the wise people you might know (Plato, Socrates, Sophocles, Euripides, as well as Roman emperors Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Nero and many others) were initiated.

People were coming to Elefsina in a procession, covering the distance on foot and using the Sacred Way, from Athens to the Sanctuary of Demeter to take part in the mysteries. Even nowadays, to visit Elefsina you have to use the same route. This road holds the same name as it did then: Sacred Route.

This city was blessed to be ruled by three great deities: Demeter - goddess of earth, wheat and cultivation, Persephone - her daughter, violently and sneakily abducted by Hades or Plouton - the god of Underworld and a dark god as well.

### **Eleusinian Mysteries... What was it about?**

The death penalty was what anyone who had been initiated received if they attempted to reveal anything about the mysteries! Although this cult lasted for more than 1000 years (the sanctuary was violently destroyed by Alaric and his hordes coming from the north, in 396 CE), we still know very little about it.

What we do know is that it was about the well-being gained through the rites and a special attempt to 'cure' the anxiety of mortals regarding the afterlife!

The mysteries were abruptly ceased in 396 CE.

### **Elefsina fell into obscurity for centuries...**

As Virginia Woolf says: 'the shrines are fallen, the oracles are dumb... We are the belated wayfarers ... at last, I say, we reached ELEVSIS - some two thousand years after our time'

And then, silence for centuries.

In the meantime new pilgrims / wanderers from all over the world were visiting the ruins and this small village of fishermen and peasants.

By the end of the 19th century, the first industries were established, located along the coastline. Little by little, because of easy access to resources from the surrounding region, they multiplied, occupying the entire coast. Over 30% of the national income was produced here!

Then, people arrived to work here from all over Greece, Asia Minor, the Black Sea - an inner emigration act. Labour union movements appeared and developed here.

Rapid environmental burden and consequences appeared: pollution in the air, in the sea. The life of people degraded...

This, in the city, homeland of Aeschylus.

Elefsina for years became the symbol of a heavily neglected and polluted city...

### **So, why Elefsina ?**

Because Elefsina persistently and for years was seriously injured.

Because Elefsina is a place where the notion of care is something more than necessary to be performed at long last.

To wake up consciences in every layer and level of modern life: in the State, in politics, in social structures and infrastructures works and initiatives, in culture and art, in social inclusion, in every other aspect you can think and bring into light.

Elefsina was chosen because it is an open challenge! Moreover, it can operate as a model of good practices for the transition from a grey past into a sustainable life relying on its cultural and humanistic assets - and this is the goal.

### **The programme of European Capital of Culture MYSTERIES of TRANSITION**

The three pillars of the programme stem from its substance:

- People - Society
- Environment
- Labour

And here comes our constant concern: how can all this rich programme of cultural, educational and artistic activities imbue the real life of the region and the city with good practices and perspectives that *last*? We must compose our legacy programme.

A city as a model that offers the appropriate field, where all the above could be investigated, exerted, applied...



It is not needless to add:  
ELEVSIS means arrival of a notable someone: person, thing or event.

So, our notable guests, welcome here in the city of Elefsina and joyfully experience our  
Mysteries of Transition!



## How to Relate

*Welcome from Lars Ebert, Secretary General, Culture Action Europe*

I want to welcome you on behalf of Culture Action Europe, the whole team, the whole board, the whole membership to our un-conference, “Beyond the Obvious 2023 | Handle with Care: Culture for Social Well-being.” The un|conference is a concept that is based on the fact that we don’t want to parachute in here and just drop some nice ideas, discuss them and then disappear again. We want to be rooted in an ongoing experience of human relationships. For us at Culture Action Europe, it is really important that whatever it is we do comes from our members. The credibility and the strength of our network are our members who meet, have relationships with each other, talk and, together, carry this conference, where we reach out and try to involve more people from the sector, especially now here with more people from Greece.

‘Care’ as ethics is something that is central for us as a network. In the ethics of care, as it was elaborated by Carol Gilligan in the 1980s and later further deepened by Joan Tronto, we complement the question, “What is just?” with the question “How do we relate?” *How to relate* really is about recognizing that each person, each community, each region, each individual and each creature on the planet has a very specific context of privileges, vulnerabilities, disadvantages, advantages, relationships and interrelationships. CAE defines itself as a network that represents the diversity of the cultural field in Europe. And that diversity requires that we look at the different members, the different situations of members, and the different projects, through very different lenses. We need to time and again ask *how to relate*. How can that member relate to others? How do we build consortia? When are these working conditions within our network fair? How do we relate very specific questions to very specific policy discussions?

Now, how do we raise our voices? Relationships are really central in the ethics of care, and require effort: the complexity of situations is a good thing. When I started with Culture Action Europe six months ago, my ambition was to extend ethical leadership. I think as a network of networks, organisations, and individuals, we must choose our battles to make system change. At the same time, we must make sure that everyone who wants to be involved, can and is involved. It will not always work and it is not easy: we have to be able to hold the tension of dilemmas, but balancing these dilemmas to the benefit of people in relation to their own abilities is very crucial. Ethical leadership means applying ethics so that we can make sure that we are there for everyone that we relate to.

Thinking about these two sectors, art and culture on the one hand and health and care and wellbeing on the other, how they can relate is a process in which we actually define what care means for all of us. What does care mean for an artist? What does care mean for a health worker? The concept of care is something to explore, not only in relation to health and well-being but also when we look at other fields where we want to mainstream art and culture in other policy areas. The Elefsina Manifesto, in which we will elaborate on all kinds of different takes on care, will be really important for us to define our future strategy. Within the framework of the Manifesto, we can really ask *how to relate*: by prioritising care, we envision a world where empathy, compassion, and a sense of interconnectedness can flourish.





## Welcome to the Mysteries of Transition

*Angeliki Lampiri, Director of Cultural Training, Eleusis 2023 European Capital of Culture*

Welcome, everyone, to Elefsina. Welcome to the Mysteries of Transition. This place is currently in a transition phase. We are trying throughout the year to have a lot of mysteries around. A lot of artists with their "little mysteries" will be around over the next few days to give you the maximum experience of the city, so each evening we will try to initiate you into our mysteries under the framework of the SYNKISMOI festival. "Synoikismos" means living together, so we are trying to activate different neighbourhoods through artistic works.

We are really excited to welcome you at this place, the Old Railway Station, because here it all started for us. These were our offices; it was an abandoned railway station. It was an area not frequently activated through social and cultural activities. We decided to hijack the space - it was our offices for many years - but when we left the space, we were not sad, because we were really excited to be activated through new projects. For us, this is the legacy, to give the space and time to people who want to create something beautiful for their city and their community and for that community to grow.

Here there is a residency space, which is now hosting a collective, Time Circus, who came 3000km on foot from Antwerp. They arrived here and are creating a kind of 'arkopolis' and will create a centre of youth.

As I said, the city is in a phase of transition, so we look forward to your feedback and that you will become ambassadors in Europe about what Elefsina is and what we are doing here in the city. It is very important to us right now.



## The Mysteries of Eleusis 2023

During the days of Beyond the Obvious | Handle with Care, participants had the opportunity to discover several of the mysteries that are part of the Eleusis 2023 programme. From contemporary dance to photography exhibitions to public banquets enriched by local folk music, here you have a small taste of what Eleusis 2023 has to offer.

### Mystery 57 Climbing Over Elefsina - Revisiting the landscapes of Elefsina

Mystery 57 Climbing over Elefsina – Revisiting the Landscapes of Elefsina is a work of research and artistic creativity that brings together artists and scientists from the fields of contemporary dance, contemporary circus, urban planning and music of the Eastern and Western Mediterranean in order to create artistic activities as explorations of public and private space, town planning and the multicultural social fabric of suburban towns. The Greek team “Ki Omos Kineitai” [And Yet It Moves] (contemporary dancers and circus artists) has a creative co-operation with French circus artists and musicians. This is a work in progress inspired by the urban landscape of Elefsina and Bagneux and the inhabitants of the two cities. This collective work takes shape in situ, through public rehearsals and the participation of amateur and local young artists. A web documentary unfolds in parallel with the main artistic work, narrating the project’s development through the eyes of the artists, the local people, the political, artistic and social institutions and organisations.

This interdisciplinary work aims also to explore the new relationships between urban planning, architecture and the performing arts, bringing artists to the forefront of the development and regeneration of deprived areas and the activation of inactive landmarks, in cooperation with the architectural team of Patrick Bouchain, famous French architect, town planner and scenographer.

In this framework, for a third consecutive year, the itinerant town planning workshops under the title “Revisiting the Landscapes of Elefsina” and the debates about the artistic project will take place with the participation of architects, town planners, researchers and citizens with an interest in public affairs and urban planning. They are invited to explore the new contingencies and new conditions of habitation in times of crisis, focusing on the temporary and flexible nature of emergency habitation systems. The commonly accepted assumption in this research project is that the way out of current crises goes through rebuilding the “neglected” territories of our cities.

LE PLUS PETIT CIRQUE DU MONDE DIRECTOR: Eleftherios Kechagioglou  
ARTISTIC DIRECTION & DIRECTION: Gaëtan Levêque  
CHOREOGRAPHY: Christina Sougioultzi & Gaëtan Levêque  
PROJECT CO-ORDINATION FOR 2023 ELEUSIS: Performing Arts Department  
CO-PRODUCED BY: 2023 Eleusis & Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (FR)

### MYSTERY 139 Alienation by Vangelis Gkinis

Alienation is a photographic project on the attrition/disaffection of working people in Greece. In the 21st century, physical wear goes together with disaffection as a result of workers’ alienation from their task, which leads to alienation from other people and ultimately from themselves. The project researches working peoples’ physical wear: the dozens of professional ailments and workplace accidents as the price paid by labour whose

aim is to produce the tangible, intellectual and moral goods required to meet human needs. Vangelis Gkinis will travel all over the country to photograph workers in all main labour sectors, starting from heavy industry (energy, shipbuilding, construction) and going all the way to contemporary professions such as sales, telecommunications, retail, hospitality, etc. The workers' photographic portraits will be accompanied by photos of work areas as well as the workers' living spaces and / or photos of their personal possessions. Once the research is finished, the material will be presented in an exhibition as well as in the form of posters in the city's public spaces.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Vangelis Gkinis (GR)  
SPECIALIST ADVISOR: Tasos Travasaros  
EXHIBITION CURATOR: Vaggelis Tatsis  
TEXT BY: Maria Paschalidou  
PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT: Chorus (GR)  
LINE PRODUCTION: Christina Kalligianni (GR)

### **MYSTERY 134 Persephone, the Red Carpet**

A work of urban scenography and social art to be rolled out in Elefsina in June 2023 with a view to revealing the possibilities for transitioning from a fractured city – in terms of its history, urban fabric and social tissue – to a cohesive city capable of dreaming about its future. By stirring up primal myths within the imaginations of local residents via the contemporary challenges facing an industrial city and by fostering public participation, the work seeks to reconcile the future with the past, acting as a model for similar European cities with comparable attributes. The red carpet – 40 metres long and 1.5 metres wide – functions in such a way as to connect with the symbolism of grandeur and formality while also differentiating itself from such aspects, transforming into a democratic symbol while still maintaining its artistic sanctity. The work will be unfurled in various Elefsina settings and neighbourhoods, for five days at a time in each place and will evolve into a “blank page” upon which the emotions it generates will be recorded. It will be open to both local residents and people passing through, of all ages, genders and ethnicities. The carpet's arrival will be heralded by a fanfare composed by the trumpet player Andreas Polyzogopoulos, joyously galvanising each neighbourhood.

CONCEIVED & REALISED BY: Kollektif MASI (GR, FR) (Madlen Anipsitaki, Simon Riedler)  
DOCUMENTARY CREATION & DIRECTION: Joshua Olsthoorn  
MUSIC: Andreas Polyzogopoulos  
SOUND ENGINEER: Yiannis Antipas  
PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT: Dinos Nikolaou (GR)

### **MYSTERY 38 Music From the Inside**

Routes through the city's communities/neighbourhoods featuring selected music coming from the houses, radiating into public space through doors and windows. A white plastic chair on a doorstep. An image enhanced by music from within. At least one tenant simply sat outside their home or stood at a window. Each route is planned to culminate in a happening of some kind (musical or other), in a square or some other open space within each neighbourhood. Music is selected in partnership with the residents of the participating houses. The formulation of each route also constitutes a kind of musical composition. House – Story – Hero(ine) – Song: the route unfurls like a spool of thread leading from one house to the next.

Curation: Adrian Frieling

## MYSTERY 49 Symposia in Kalympaki neighbourhood

Nutrition and food are some of the most important elements of cultural history; it's not only what we eat, but how we eat it. From the selection of raw material and the journey it makes to reach our plate to the way we process and serve it, but also from the traditions, taboos, conditions of coexistence and conversations that accompany our meals, one can draw valuable conclusions about ourselves and our lives. Or, as Jean-François Bergier says, time and geometry, goods and people – it is all reflected on the plate. Through a series of activities in the form of extended public banquets enriched by local folk music, we focus on food and the cultural exchange that accompanies it. Each time, participants invited from the human geography of Elefsina draw inspiration from a specific theme and specific recipes from rich folkloric traditions. Mystery 49 Symposia is an opportunity to meet and eat together; to exchange gastronomic traditions, stories and manners; to come a little closer to each other through our most unpretentious yet most sensuous daily habit. The activities are organised in collaboration with local folklore associations of Elefsina.

Concept & Curation: 2023 Eleusis – General Artistic Department

In collaboration with the island folklore associations of Elefsina: the Elefsina “Archangel Michael” Symian Cultural Association, the Thriasian Plain Corfiote Union and “Saint Spyridon” of Megara, the “Saint Markella” Elefsina Chian Union, the “Archangel Paermiotis” Dodecanese Association of Elefsina

## MYSTERY 42 Futuring Waters

Futuring Waters is an art and research project conceived by Jenny Marketou. Interdisciplinary at its core, it will itself become a community, engaging as many young Elefsinians as possible while making art meaningful within a social context. Futuring Waters invites us to engage in a global response to climate change and the rights of water, addressing visions of the “future of water” in all its scientific, artistic and literary ramifications. Futuring Waters considers ecology as embedded in everyday practices and agencies and roots itself firmly in the complex realities of Elefsina. Futuring Waters comprises three workshops and gatherings that will be held in spring-summer 2023. These water workshops will lead to a water exhibition presented in September 2023.

## MYSTERY 144 Leave What You Loved Once

"Leave What You Loved Once" is an interactive installation that invites the public to contribute personal objects they no longer cherish. Composed of transparent cell box units, it creates a floating display against the backdrop of Elefsina, allowing the objects and the landscape to become the artwork themselves. Asking people to let go of things, is a symbolic action with multilayered meanings. It captures objects in the moment of transitioning from their functional individually-owned, indoor existence to the public domain, sparing them from becoming trash.

The growing collection of personal objects becomes a monument hosting the leftovers of social and a symbol of coexistence across divergent entities. Locals and visitors are encouraged to participate in a collective action, creating a mélange of kilometre-zero objects and ones coming from afar.

"Leave What You Loved Once" aspires to touch upon critical issues such as property, production, consumerism, democracy, changing Mediterranean landscapes, historical and contemporary remains and current environmental and anthropological crises. A call for collaboration and inclusivity, prompting participants and viewers to contemplate and reexamine



the relationship with the material world, inviting us to recognise the potential for new histories and narratives through the objects we leave behind.

ARTIST: Elena Demetria Chantzis (GR)

PRODUCTION: Wild Reeds (Panos Giannikopoulos) (GR)

### **MYSTERY 142 Oh So Now Elefsina Is Growing Wheat!**

The subjects of this audio installation are the Arvanites of Elefsina, the awareness of their identity and their contemptuous relations with other Arvanites, such as those from Corinth and Mandra. The work takes the idiomatic expression “grurë edhe Lepsina bëri” – or “Elefsina grew grain too” – as its point of departure. Discussions about the Arvanitika language ring out amid the ruins of the old Vit-A-Min Pappas & Sons factory. Today, the facility is used as a storage space by neighbouring shops. Goods produced by the former factory sit alongside pot plants, picture frames and furniture. The project spotlights a story about language and minorities, while also revealing the history of a past light industry and its present relationship with the city.

ARTIST COLLECTIVE: Errands (GR)

TEAM MEMBERS: Sofa Dona, Dimitris Theodoropoulos, Yoko, Elsa Kiourtsoglou, Alexia Sarantopoulou, Ilan Manouach, Nina Pappa

Collaborators: Mihalis Eleftheriou (language transfer), Eirini Tountasaki (anthropologist)

### **MYSTERY 168 Mobile Solar Cinema**

Solar World Cinema is an international network of modern mobile cinemas that run exclusively on solar energy. In partnership with the Peloponnisos International Documentary Film Festival, it is descending upon the land of Elefsina with an environmental message that concerns renewable energy, sustainable cinema and green technologies. Staying true to the tradition of travelling cinemas that once toured the countryside, screening films at open-air venues in remote areas, Mobile Solar Cinema is coming to the industrially developed modern city of Elefsina – a place facing acute environmental challenges – with a view to raising awareness about the importance of making the transition to renewable sources of energy. Every piece of equipment used by this mobile cinema is exclusively powered by solar energy. All public screenings are held after the sun goes down. And since the cinema is completely self-sufficient, it can travel to any location. The project’s programme of ecological film screenings is also accompanied by a series of workshops for children.

Journey to Utopia (Premiere)

Director/screenplay: Erlend E. Mo

Duration 89'

INVITED SPEAKER: Eva Stefani, Director - Professor

The progressive Mo family lead a perfect life on their farm in Norway. But recently, anxiety and fear about the planet they will bequeath to their children has been keeping them up at night. Taking a giant leap of faith, the family decides to take action and move to Permatopia, a new, self-sufficient, organic cooperative in Denmark.

CO-ORDINATORS: Gina Petropoulou, Kleoni Flessa

INSTRUCTOR: Stefania Charitou

PRODUCTION: Peloponnisos International Documentary Film Festival (GR), Kalamata Creative Documentary Centre (GR)



## To Care, To Cure, To Comfort

*Maja Kuzmanović & Nik Gaffney*

Care is more than a topic of conversation or a sector to engage with. Care is an attitude, a lens through which to view the world, moment by moment. In each moment, the instinctive fight-or-flight reaction can be transformed into an attentive response and any activity has the potential to become a re-animating force, an act of caring.

To care, to cure, to comfort. To be with. To help cope, regardless of the situation. “Being with” involves allowing yourself to be touched by the joys and sorrows of another. To be touched by external circumstances. Thrown off-course by the sheer rawness of the moment, by your own inability to make things better, by our fragility, impermanence and mortality.

We learn to “be with” when looking after a sick child, tending to a garden, or when caring for the dying. “Being with” a person or a process that you can’t quite understand can be frightening and uncomfortable, yet it can also become an instrument for discernment, a compass for navigating ambivalence. Care first, do later.

The work of care in the Anthropocene is a struggle with scale and scope and sentience. What does care for a burning forest look like? For an unstoppable flood? For an economy in crisis? For the endless migration of humans and other animals?

If we assume that the entire material bestiary has some form of sentience, how do we respond to climate change, pandemics, mass extinction or speciation? Even if we are not directly responsible for the causes, each of us is responsible for how we live with the consequences. Responsible to and for each other.

Do you care?

How do you care?

Where do you learn how to care?

How can you care for something able to consume you completely?

The space of care exists in parallel to the space of “problems” and “solutions”. Underneath the litany of blame and judgement. Beneath economic systems and ecosystems. Beneath worldviews and opinions. Deep, deep down in a place where words and worlds intertwine. Where myths and metaphors grow from the direct experience of entangled relationships. Transferred through a touch, a broken bone, a bedtime story.

The patterns of care solidify through repetition. From thoughts to words, from words to actions, from actions to habits and from habits to character. From a person to a clan to a culture. This process takes time. An instant in geological time, generations in human time.

Maybe in order to care across spatial and temporal scales — to care for a loved one as much as for an eroding hill or decaying infrastructure — we need alternatives to the current cultural imaginaries. They need queering and complexifying. We need new stories to live by. New or alternative myths, drawn from ever more diverse mythologies.

Perhaps most urgently we need stories that can cultivate our internal landscapes. Widen the reach of the human sensorium. Transform reactions into responses. Rewire our neural pathways. Embody other mindstates.

Until we stop taking ourselves so seriously (or not seriously enough). Until our individual identities are shattered and smeared and re-congealed innumerable times. Until we understand that we exist because of and despite relating to everything else. Until we understand that we are hydrogen ripped from its context, mixed with the dust of dead stars. That we are endlessly recycled water and crystallising cyclones. That we are teeming civilisational hosts. Most importantly, that we are capable of care. To care for humans and to care deeply for the earth. Care as an antidote to nihilism, greed or indifference. Care as the potion we can take to remember that we are inseparable from all animate matter. Touched by and in touch with billions of beings, moment by moment. In a world handled with care.

# Ten thoughts on Care

By Gigi Argyropoulou

*This text is a performative talk that took place in the context of the conference “Handle with Care: Culture for Social Well-being” organised by Culture Action Europe in Elefsina 2023 EU Cultural Capital. It brings together different speculations on care, caring and spaces of care as starting points for further discussions on care and surroundings, social and ecological interdependencies. “Thoughts” often are passing, repetitive, incomplete, retelling words of others, haunting us otherwise while at times leave us in despair and at other times offer ways to unexpected resolutions. As a small collection of such thoughts, this text finds a way between situating and retelling, caring and curating, spaces and practices in the hope that it might point towards possible new relations between art practices and ecologies of care.*

## 1. TO CARE

To care is to recognise relations, forms of dependency. Forms of life grow dependant on relations of care - to care is almost equivalent with living. Throughout our lives, we depend on visible and invisible labours of care by familiar others, strangers, structures of support, infrastructures, institutions, organisms, systems, our surroundings. To care is to recognise such dependencies between humans, between humans and more than humans; between humans and infrastructures, humans, non-humans and the landscape, surroundings and natural environment. “Social and ecological interdependence defines the relations of care and the effort to sustain those relations defines the labour of care” Graziano et. al write. Care also comes with other words: Repair, Maintenance, Healing, Support, Trust, Solidarity, Love. Practices of care make visible how we value ourselves and others as well as the natural environment that makes life possible. Perhaps we can think of an ecology of care or caring ecologies as Francesco Salvini (2019) puts it as practising, making care “with the surroundings” and thus acknowledging the “interdependence of care within the social, mental and environmental organisation of everyday life”. How then do ecologies and dependencies of care affect specific ways that arts and cultural practices operate today? And in what ways might the arts respond to the ongoing “crisis of care” of our time?

## 2. WORDS OF CARE

Emma Dowling writes that a link between “happiness” and “care” expresses a basic dilemma of care: “even if care work remains unequally distributed, caring is fundamental to what is meaningful about social life”. Dowling returns to the etymology of the word “care” that arises from the Old English *caru*, meaning “sorrow, anxiety and grief,” the “burdens of the mind.” “Let’s think of the image of “care-free,” as being without a worry in the world” or “care-ful” as being cautious. This etymology is different from the Latin *cura* (that curating arises from) “that has the meaning of looking after, or ensuring the well-being of, something or someone. A fine line between caring and fretting, between ensuring one’s own well-being and someone else’s and between being anxious or worried about oneself or someone else, or



even about the state of world”, between thinking about burdens of a here and now and producing actions that support/sustain others, ourselves - and the world. In a way, this specific tension between *caru* and *cura*, might be productive as we consider current artistic practices keeping in mind that the impulse to care as Dowling suggests “can come from fear as much as from a sense of affection and connection”.

### 3. ARTS AND TURNS

During the last decades in Europe, through multiple crises, we witnessed a proliferation of artistic practices that sought to experiment with models of democracy and participation, as well as forms of caring in relation to socio-political-ecological realities. Not unrelated to such explorations are the art practices that emerged since the 1990s, the so-called social turn that experimented with social encounters, urban interventions and structures of togetherness. While the art publics of the “social turn” appeared often implicit in neoliberal agendas and urban regeneration projects, we also began to witness what we might call a “political turn”: art practices that attempt to find ways to intervene into the political. At the same time, in Southern-Europe and Greece in particular emergent collective practices appeared that formed the so-called solidarity movement. If we critically reflect on such practices and artistic interventions, might we identify models of making critical spaces of care and publics that embody different social pedagogies of being and doing together? How might we offer new ways to inhabit with others “the street, the factory, the theatre or the museum” –and even more the parks, the fields, the seaside, hills and the landscape? What art practices might emerge from this tension between *caru* and *cura*, to be worried and anxious about the state of the world and at the same time taking care, caring and acting in supportive ways for others, surroundings and even the world?

### 4. NO FUTURE

In the summer of 2016, a DIY performance biennial took place in Athens with the title *NO FUTURE*. It was initiated in the occupied cultural space of Green Park and extended to the nearby park of Pedion tou Areos and then travelled by boat to the island of Cythera together with participants, passers-by and audiences. Seeking to problematise the role of performance in the neoliberal narrative, this DIY biennial engaged in performative and ongoing disruptions “between the institution and the self-instituted, between buildings and parks, between the centre and the periphery, between urban and rural.” Exploring modes of being in and with the landscape the biennial proposed the form “of “self-curating” as assembling. Taking and making care as a collective practice. Reflecting on the numerous self-organised activities of the last decade in Greece, the biennial proposed that the relationship with a ruptured futurity might be a potent one. It proposed that the destabilisation of this “control over future” could lead to potential practices of caring for the here and now. Setting unexpected public stages in buildings and parks, squares and boats, beaches and other public sites experimented with the sun and the sea and the limits of the landscape together with institutional structures and challenges of togetherness. Forming routes and journeys that after their ephemeral disappearance still sketched haunted horizons of plotting, being and doing together, in and for the landscape.

## 5. ETHICS OF CARE

Joan Tronto (1993) has elaborated on values of care that she defined as attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, meeting others needs. Ethics of care challenge power relations as they recognise ways of relating. What spaces of care might look like across different scales – the personal, the social, the urban, the rural, the environmental? and in what ways might cultural workers be able to produce spaces of care across different scales?

## 6. TROUBLES OF CARE

They ask: why care? Who cares? Why care so much? Why does no-one else care? To care means to be implicated. If it is fucked up/bad for you, it is fucked up/bad for me. Care takes us away from the idea of an autonomous independent being. Care always demonstrates relation, interdependency.

“We live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response [...] staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or eden-like pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (Haraway, 2016: 1). As Haraway proposes, care is the “ability to respond” together, reversing the word “response-ability”.

## 7. HILLS AND FIELDS

A peripatetic public programme on *Hills and Fields* took place in May 2022 in Athens. The public programme of *Hills and Fields* invited participants to discursive, poetic and performative inhabitations that rethought the relationship between art practice and mental health, architecture and pedagogy, poetry and urban praxis, resistance and joy. Focusing on the parks and fields of the city and areas that during the pandemic functioned as the ephemeral transgenerational social zones the programme sought to reconsider our relationship with the landscape, how we care for and with others. Combining different publics and travelling through different parks and hills of the city the programme through actions, performances, discussions, walks and interventions invited participants to ephemerally reconfigure material environments through and beyond bodies and form potential ephemeral performative publics. Opening space for methods of militant curating and artistic actions that work with and care for the landscape.

## 8. CARING IS NOT SIMPLY BEING “NICE”

Care work, although essential for the functioning of society, is systematically undervalued. As Gratziano et al. (2021) write care involves “power relations and processes of discipline, exploitation and harm. It is a necessary and skilled form of labour that is taken on by workers, mostly unwaged women and migrants, who themselves receive the least amount of

care". "To care" should also lead us to a radical rethinking of structural inequalities, hierarchies and power relations considering who can afford care and who is care for. "We need to think about democracy as the allocation of caring responsibilities" Joan Tronto states in her lecture *The Challenges of Medical Care in a Caring Democracy*. Tronto argues that care and democracy don't seem to go well together and care has been kept out of politics. There is, she argues, a need to think about what democracy is and about democracy to become by including caring. Thinking about these issues Tronto expanded her model of care by adding another phase: caring with.

## 9. INSTITUTIONS OF CARE

Can a practice of instituting also be a practice of care? What might institutions of care look like? How can they practise this "caring with" or making care with surroundings and how such practices might be translated into a modus operandi of art spaces and institutions? How can they inhabit this gap between *caru* and *cura*, of both being anxious about the state of the world and at the same time demonstrate relations of care for workers, publics and environment? Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez in her article *For Slow Institutions*, calls to "imagine new ecologies of care as a continuous practice of support" and suggests "to radically open up our institutional borders and show how these work - or don't work - in order to render our organisations palpable, audible, sentient, soft, porous and above all, decolonial and anti-patriarchal". Gerald Raunig in his article *Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming* discusses parrhesia as a double strategy. Parrhesia has the meaning in Greek "to say everything", to speak freely and clearly especially when this is hazardous, often coming from below and directed upward. Raunig proposes that this could be a strategy that is at the same time "attempt of involvement and engagement in a process of hazardous refutation", as well as "self-questioning".

Perhaps institutions of care might then imply this double strategy of self-questioning and speaking the truth to themselves and publics examining power relations that they participate in while at the same time demonstrate how they are supported by public relations and networks of dependencies. To behave perhaps as Bojana Kunst (2015) proposes "like a plant, a weed, stuck in the ground but nevertheless connected with the surrounding habitat, an earthly infrastructure". In other words, as I have written elsewhere such institutions might operate as "social processes ... acknowledging the vulnerability of bodies that comprise them and embracing discontinuity, brokenness, unsettledness, dependency and other human and non-human qualities. Presensing, sketching and practising together supportive infrastructures and other forms of life" (2021). In between *cure* and *caru* such practices might make visible new ecologies of care for and with the surrounding landscape.

## 10. CARE IN THRESHOLDS

Pantxo Ramas (2020) in his article *Caring for a Pandemic World* returns to Starhawk reflections on social permaculture to say that, to care for the world, one must try to inhabit the thresholds between the past, the present and the future. First of all, "we need to care for the past, that is, to analyse and intervene on the structural problems of our social organisation". Caring for the present, on the other hand, would mean transforming "this practice of critique into an instituting intervention". Caring, then, is a radical practice of organisation and transformation of the present. Caring for the future is inventing ways of

transition that structure social reproduction in another way. Admitting relation dependency, implication, responsibility, connectedness, caring with and for the landscape and others. and to do one has to inhabit thresholds. Instituting otherwise.

Dowling writes: “Take care,” we say to a friend as time spent together comes to an end. “Take care” is not just advice, however she continues: “it is an imperative—to slow down and take time to be attentive to oneself, to others, to one’s surroundings”.

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## Keynote speech: Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission for Promoting our European Way of Life



*Vice-President of the European Commission Margaritis Schinas took the stage alongside CAE Secretary General Lars Ebert to deliver a keynote address focused on the importance of supporting cross-sectorial work between health and culture at the European level. Vice-President Schinas also referred to the European Commission's recently adopted Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health, as well as the Commission's launch of the European Mental Health Capacity-Building Initiative worth 11 million euros to support Member States in building capacity for an approach that promotes mental health across all policies.*

Dear friends,

I particularly appreciate your title 'Beyond the Obvious'. In Europe today we must go beyond the obvious. Beyond the obvious in linking culture to well-being and beyond the obvious in our ability to care for each other. So my thanks to the organisers – and to all of you for devoting your time to this important question.



I could not think of a better place to explore this issue than Elefsina, European Capital of Culture 2023 and home of the Eleusinian mysteries. There is no story more emblematic of caring than a mother that refuses to give up her daughter.

When Demeter, goddess of fertility and agriculture, found that Persephone had been abducted, the seasons halted. Life itself stopped.

This is the power of connection. It keeps us moving. It keeps us alive.

Especially through crisis.

And all of us, in Europe, have had more than our fair share of crises in the last three and a half years.

We faced a global pandemic that seriously limited our ability to be together. COVID-19 made closeness with each other a threat.

And now Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has displaced men, women, children. Their lives were interrupted, fighting to stay connected to us, connected to Europe.

These challenges, along with our personal everyday struggles, exact a heavy toll. Even before the pandemic, one in six people in the EU suffered with their mental health. That was 84 million people, at an estimated cost of over 600 billion euros – more than 4% of Europe's GDP!

Made worse by Covid. Made even worse by the war. And worst of all, for vulnerable groups.

Imagine being young, building your network and suddenly being disconnected from those you love. It is no accident that, in many Member States, the number of young people reporting symptoms of depression more than doubled during the pandemic.

Elderly people are another vulnerable group deeply affected by mental health challenges, especially since the pandemic. There is a real loneliness epidemic that heavily contributes to this reality.

And then there are the millions of displaced people fleeing the war in Ukraine, separated from the life they knew.

Throughout all these challenges, the one thing we keep coming back to is connection. The worst feeling one can have in a situation of crisis is feeling alone.

And this is where I come back to Demeter. Persephone was in literal hell. She could not ask for help. But Demeter did not give up. She kept that connection going.

This is what culture does best. It leaves nobody behind, pulling us up even when we cannot ask for help. At their most basic level, culture, art, expression, simply sharing and listening to one another – these are the anchors that define our European way of life.

You are these anchors. So let me take this moment to thank you all. Culture always gives life meaning, but this was especially so during the pandemic. And we have all of you to thank for it. Like Demeter, you, our cultural operators, our artists, our creatives, did not give up, even when the very arts you mastered could not be easily performed and your livelihood was threatened.

When we started working on a comprehensive approach to mental health, everyone reminded me that culture pulls us up, lifts us and brings us together. So I said "We cannot treat mental health in isolation. We need a holistic approach". We discussed this last February, when I was with you for the *Cultural Deal for Europe* in Brussels and I said to you then, what I say again today: "Mental health crosses all topics and must be fertilised by all EU policies".

From the start, we did not do it alone. We did it together with the Member States, with the European Parliament, with stakeholders, researchers and citizens. In fact, this initiative was born as a response to a call stemming from the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Now, we have created a comprehensive, prevention-oriented and multi-stakeholder approach to mental health at EU level.

It focuses on three guiding principles.

First, prevention.

Second, access to high-quality, affordable mental healthcare and treatment.

And third, reintegrating society after recovery. Rebuilding and reinforcing the social connections that allow those suffering to manage, to process and to heal.

This social aspect is extremely important. We need to recognise that mental health is everyone's concern, because we all owe solidarity to each other.

Mental health is connected to every aspect of our lives. Our places of learning, our jobs, our cities and towns. Our goals and our ability to achieve them. The challenges we face and our ability to have a hopeful outlook towards the future.

And our communication on mental health takes all of this into account.

We have identified significant budget opportunities to implement mental health action across policies. Some EUR 1.23 billion is available to take us forward.

Let me give you three concrete examples:

First, our health professionals, our teachers, our social workers, all tell us they need better training. Via a major training and exchange programme for professionals, worth EUR 9 million, we will bring health professionals, teachers and social workers together for more and better training. This initiative will also develop a toolkit, for a multi-disciplinary approach to mental health capacity-building.

Secondly, we are launching a *European Mental Health Capacity-Building Initiative* worth 11 million euros to support Member States in building capacity for an approach that promotes mental health across all policies.

And thirdly, to respond to the increasing concerns about children and young people's mental health, we are putting together a toolkit addressing the key determinants of mental and physical health in children and young people.

This Communication is a seed we wish to grow. It is a process. And we want to bring together everyone concerned.

And we know we are not starting from scratch. There has been a lot of work done before, fertilising the soil upon which we can place this seed.

This was the case, for example, with the work of our colleagues from the World Health Organization, who have been pioneers in looking at the role of arts and culture in mental health. In 2019, they published a scoping review on the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being. The report brought together over 3000 scientific studies on how arts can support the promotion of health, as well as the prevention of ill health, treatment and management of disease.

In EU culture policy, we have focused on well-being for several years now, even before the pandemic. Both the *New European Agenda for Culture* from 2018 and the *Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022* mention the topic.

The current *EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026* includes more cross-sectorial work on this topic between health and culture, through an Open Method of Coordination expert group with representatives from the Member States. It will start at the beginning of next year.

And of course, there are the projects themselves, breaking the ground upon which we can cultivate. One of them is the reason we are here today.

*CultureForHealth* has done essential work, under the leadership of Culture Action Europe. Both your scientific literature review and your policy recommendations are very thought-provoking!

We know that participatory arts activities reduce anxiety and depression, improve mood, enable self-expression and empowerment, as well as increase social engagement, bonding and inclusion. In group settings, these activities are even more effective at reducing loneliness than simply meeting as a group.

We have seen in your six pilot projects some telling examples about how the arts and culture change lives. Look for example at the *Group singing for maternal mental health* pilot, helping mothers with postpartum depression, implemented in Romania.

This pilot helps mothers come together, be creative, be themselves and be each others' support system. Because motherhood isn't easy, but it is much harder on your own.

Our soil is rich for projects like these. Creative Europe, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe – these programmes bring together large envelopes to empower researchers, social entrepreneurs and cultural operators alike, connecting people.

Now is the time to draw on all this evidence. Now is the time to build on the good practices we have developed. Now is the time for systemic change. We have learned a lot – now let us put these lessons to work.

For our part, we are paying close attention to the policy recommendations of the CultureForHealth report and will continue to work to empower you all.

Working across sectors is not easy. We need to build trust, to translate each other's language. It makes me very happy to see that culture on prescription is now being implemented here in Greece and that you will have the chance to listen to two Greek experts on this, right after my intervention.

I know that, like Demeter, you will not give up, even when those around you cannot ask for help. Because art and culture are the act of not giving up on other people.

These seeds we have planted will grow. Thanks to you and thanks to all who support you. You can count the European Commission among your greatest supporters.

I wish you a fruitful discussion.

## Q&A Highlights

*Led by Lars Ebert, CAE Secretary-General*

It is great to hear how the policy recommendations about which we have just been talking just before the arrival of Mr. Schinas, have already found their way into political practice. Not only in the communication but also for instance in the capacity-building that Mr. Schinas mentioned has been a very central aspect that we have been discussing this morning.

Taking two buzzwords from your speech: “connection” and “leaving no one behind”. These are two concepts that we have been discussing all together in the last days when we discussed “care”. Connections were really important to us, amongst ourselves as a sector, to empower each other and to inform our opinions and our needs and what we can contribute, but also the notion that we *cannot* leave anyone behind and we need to be very careful how we talk about the issues that are important to us in order to be recognisable for everyone that we are working for.

In a way, “care” has been a political factor for us. Looking at that at this moment time on the political agenda, we are one year before the European election, we are one year since the conference on the Future of Europe gave citizens the opportunity to discuss bottom-up where they see the future of Europe. Culture Action Europe ran a project, *Amplify*, to inform the conference. We worked in 12 countries with artists and citizens to ask their opinions and

then submitted it to the report - though we must mention that we were disappointed to see how little culture was mentioned in the report - but there is this concern about the future of Europe in citizens. There is concern about the elections coming up. We have been talking about the role that culture can play for mental health and in many other sectors.

**Q: Beyond instrumentalising culture (which we find important but also dangerous) can I ask you how you see culture shaping the future of Europe as a political vision? You have been talking about values, the image of Europe, how do you see our role in that?**

Margaritis Schinas VP (MS): When Ursula von der Leyen gave me my portfolio four years ago, she said to me "I have an idea for you. I want you to be the most anthropocentric member of my team". We need anthropocentric policies together in Europe, which has been missing at European level. When we were talking about the mental health communication, practically every commissioner took the floor and had something to share. It is not a scientific, sectorial question, it is everywhere. How do we then shape that into something Europeans can perceive?

Elections are coming up next year, how can we motivate Europeans to go and vote? The soil is fertilised enough for anthropocentric policies and we have enough money for health. 7 of every 10 euros spent on social policy worldwide are spent in the EU. We need to find ways of letting Europeans know that this is happening, we need lots of activities, lots of discussions. And not just in Brussels. De-Brusselise! Take Brussels out of Europe.

I invite you all to take some time to go through the communication and the twenty flagship actions specified. We don't need diagnostics, we need to know what to do about the programme. The flagship initiatives are beyond the clinical world and have to do with stressors, inclusion, access, mobility, training, creativity. Not enough to proclaim a cross-cutting element, need to make it happen.

**Q: On the topic of health, you said you have to respond to citizens' wants beyond EU competence. Now after the conference on the Future of Europe, as Vice-President of the Commission, how can you better support the cultural and creative sectors in fulfilling their role?**

MS: I come from a small village of 500 people and they ask when it comes to health, what is the EU doing? I cannot respond with a description of what EU competence is. Health is part of the legacy of this Commission. We have exhausted every competence; there has been a miracle. Vaccines, HERA, the proposal on a European data health space, the Action Plan against Cancer, now onto mental health.

There is so much we can do as Europeans to fertilise these policies without stepping on the toes of Member States. Paying for mobility is EU competence, providing support for professionals, training for professionals, it is all EU competence. We need to make sure all of this is like a galaxy where all the planets have a place and the overall alignment is right: health, culture, mobility, skills in perfect alignment.



**Q: The current commissioner also has innovation and research in their profile, which shows the link and puts us on the same platform. Can you look into the future on this?**

There is a clear logic to what the President of this Commission did regarding culture, education, innovation and sport. However, reporting to two different Vice-Presidents, each of whom now have the portfolio thoroughly split between them. If it were up to me, we would keep this mega portfolio, but under one Vice-President. And I think it is better under “European Way of Life” than under “Competition”. Culture will never be *stricto sensu* about competitiveness.

## Different Takes on Care



*This year's Beyond the Obvious opened the floor to exploration and dialogue on the concept of care. [A series of two online talks](#), preceding the Elefsina gathering, focused on politics, ethics and aesthetics of care, care for the planet and communities, care for each other. We specifically discussed the evidence on the role of culture in improving health and well-being and asked ourselves how can culture and participation in the cultural life of communities nourish the sense of social and individual well-being. These online talks served as stepping stones on a path towards the in-person conversations during the Handle with Care: Culture for Social Well-Being gathering.*

*We heard new takes on care at the gathering in Elefsina, We had the privilege of hearing from Katerina Gregos (Greece), artistic director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST), Athens, Philsan Omar Osman (Somalia/Belgium) who is an aspiring writer, activist and community builder and Natassa Dourida (Greece), sociocultural engineer and creator of the community development project "Communitism".*

### Katerina's Story

**Katerina Gregos** is a curator, writer and educator. She is currently artistic director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST), Athens. For more than twenty years, her curatorial practice has consistently explored the relationship between art, society and politics with a particular view on questions of democracy, human rights, economy, ecology, crises

*and changing global production circuits. She has curated numerous large-scale international exhibitions and nine international biennials.*

*Most recently she was chief curator of the 1st Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1): Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More (2018). Gregos has also curated three critically acclaimed National Pavilions at the Venice Biennale: Denmark (2011), Belgium (2015) – which featured the work of Sammy Baloji - and Croatia (2019). She regularly publishes on art, artists, society and culture, in books, catalogues and periodicals.*

Care is gaining currency because it is in such short supply. We only care for animals when they are already going extinct. We live in a culture of crisis. With hypercapitalism and an atomised ultra-competitive culture, we are not in unison with each other, even in the culture sector. As curators, artists, cultural practitioners - in many countries no one pays for your social security and there is a neoliberal attitude to how you work and how you're hired.

We need Care 101. Most institutions have no care for individual practitioners. Care means proper remuneration of artists and cultural workers, not visibility. Artists need to get what they are owed. Care is a practical and hands-on issue and we are implementing it at the National Museum.

We set up a scheme of fair pay two years ago, with a fee structure based on time and work put into production as well as per diems for artists coming from abroad. Hospitality is very important, investing time in how we receive people. We do not ask artists living mostly in conditions of precarity to donate their works. Instead, we aim to stimulate the local arts economy. Care is about providing opportunity, so we create opportunities for networking and connection-building internationally.

Time is integral to care, time to read, eat, drink, be merry, dance. Digital media have been adopted unthinkingly, without thinking of implications, ending up with acceleration, information overload, unprecedented levels of stress and burn-out societies. Care also means caring for the time of co-workers, not thoughtlessly deploying emails. Inclusivity, mediation for access to information and creating a hospitable space are all very important.

Care and sustainability are about reckoning and being realistic about what we can and cannot do. We are under pressure to tick all the right boxes for funding. But we cannot tick all the boxes, cannot excel in all domains with budgets constantly being cut. We need to do more than speak about all this, we need to practise. Politics starts with practising what you preach.

## **Philsan's Story**

*Philsan Omar Osman (she/her) co-authored 'Dare To Care: Ecofeminism as a Source of Inspiration' (EPO 2021). She studies African Languages and Cultures at the University of Gent and volunteers for Black History Month Belgium, the online feminist magazine Spijker Magazine and Burgerplicht in Gent. Philsan is from Somalia and is a writer, activist and community builder.*

I was invited today in the frame of a book I co-wrote about ecofeminism, about politicising care. Ecofeminism is a much misunderstood term. It is a framework for understanding oppression and is inherently intersectional. In a time of multi-crises, disenfranchised people are understanding that the same structures oppressing them are oppressing the natural world and their ways of life.

Oppression can happen on different levels and multiple levels can be encapsulated in one person. Societal structures are at the root of that. For me, ecofeminism is rooted in radical black feminism. Care must be at the community level; what we can do on a social and political level to address disenfranchisement, pushing our politics into practice. We radically, actively practise care, where we hold space for one another in a very real way.

Capitalist structures demand I over-present and push people to want to take time from others as much as is taken from them. Reappropriating time is one of the most radical things we can do for ourselves. Politicising care helps us to organise, to form community, to protest and demand the change we want to see. Ecofeminism is a great way of doing this

The Chipko movement in the Himalayas is a good example of this. It contained a reciprocal relationship with the environment, with deforestation affecting their way of life and communities. They took nonviolent action, walking into forests and tying themselves to trees. Nonviolent organising can be part of the solution. They did not think of themselves as ecofeminists, but were caring for themselves and their communities. Their inspiration lives on in the ecofeminism movement today.

## Natassa's Story

**Natassa Dourida** defines herself as a sociocultural engineer. She has a background on structural Engineering ( NTUA, 2008) with an Msc Arch in Restorations of Monuments (NTUA 2013) and training in cultural management ( StAart, 2015). She is currently a fellow in the chair of Architecture and Urban Transformation (Newrope, ETH Zurich).

*Her work relates to the motivation of creative communities towards reviving the abandoned historical buildings of Athens by building collaborative relationships with the owners. She was the creator of the community development project "Communitism" (2015) which evolved into the association "Union of citizens for the preservation of newer cultural heritage with the descriptive title Communitism". The association operated the first community-run sociocultural centre of Athens (March 2017- May 2023), in a neoclassical building in Metaxougheio, central Athens, entrusted by the owners.*

*Natassa has served as a President ( 2017-2020), Secretary General (2020-2022), and currently as a Treasurer of the association, while empowering members of her community to take up leading roles and establish alternative and creative professional practices.*

Starting from a realisation of a lack of care in Athens, I decided to contribute to restoring Athens, seeing both people and cultural heritage buildings as assets to achieve this. What if we don't wait for the state to take care of us, but we take care of each other?

In 2017, we got access to a building of 1200m<sup>2</sup> to start a revival project, opening it as a common good to the city and opened up to creatives: ⅓ expats from central Europe, ⅓ displaced from the global south and ⅓ from Athens, who all pledged to take care of each other and the building. During these years, we developed educational and artistic projects related to Communitism's mission, while offering daily stewardship for the maintenance of the building as well as the commoning practices.

The centre developed into an open lab for the cultural commons of the city, developing a self-governance model and collective practices that facilitated the multiple realities of the city, while maintaining the building alive. The association's vision is to multiply the developed model in more unutilised neoclassical buildings, in hopes that a new way of experiencing the city will emerge.

Now for six years, around 130 people have been activated, they have promoted leadership, developed a culture of care and learnt how to design with empathy. We now have to give away the building, so this cycle is ending, but now all these people are trained in care and there are still over 600 abandoned buildings in Athens. I continue to contribute locally and internationally to the public dialogue for the need of third spaces in Athens and the possibilities these buildings can offer towards a necessary social change.

## Q&A Highlights

### **Defining Self-care:**

*Katerina: Self-care can be misunderstood, in a new-agey way: spa, gym, body. I understand it in the way you try to reach a state of equilibrium in a neo-liberal capitalist world, even in the culture sector. Resist that. Know when to stop. Rest. Take time to think. Spend time with loved ones.*

Self-care is rooted in community, home, actively created by everyone in it. It is about asking for help and support. It is about connection to nature, which is part of the historical concept of community. Everything is linked. Structures of family and friends are really important for solidarity and surviving crisis.

### **The Time it Takes to Change:**

*Philsan: The reality of being a black woman is that I will never see the changes I fight for become a reality. But I have to accept this; I do not do it for myself, but for generations to come.*

You have to recognise oppressive structures, but not dwell on them. Change does not have to be a big bombastic thing. What are we giving to each other in this moment, in this context? What will come of it? It will be better. The market often doesn't offer us the opportunities to do things in our own way; existing systems are designed to crush diversity. We create a moment of utopia, to inspire and empower. Cultures don't change in a day. We have to accept that we got something from previous movements and inspired others in turn. We should not just follow strict steps set out for us. In order to change, we need people to create the paradigm-shift and people who stick to their guns, unequivocally. Mentality is the problem, not just money.

### **Avoiding Instrumentalisation for Self-Care, Maintaining Radicality:**

*Natassa: There is a power dynamic when we are always having to defend ourselves in the employer-employee relationship. To resolve that, we agreed that in our system, we would have a map of thirds: one third for which creative task, one third for which volunteering project and one third for which paid task.*

Institutions need to practise what they preach and stick to it. We need to refuse to be put in a situation of low/no payment and speak up about how the language of care is instrumentalised by institutions to acquire social capital. We need to do this together to create change.

Remove yourself from thinking you are only a cultural worker - it is not your whole identity. Prioritise other things in your life that make you who you are. Act as a group, we need to come together and put theories into practice as a community of cultural workers. It is the point of social movements to keep democracy alive even within institutions.

### **Young People and Over-Use of Technology:**

*Philsan: Young people have grown up during this time of multi-crisis; their futures are not guaranteed and they are the first generation to have it worse than the generation before them (at least in the northern hemisphere). They are living with a lot of stress and anxiety, because of the structures they live under, rather than being online too much.*

There is a schism of misunderstanding when talking about young people. There is an idea of shorter attention spans, too much time online, that they are more inclined to engage in selfishness, but it is important to place their reality. Intergenerational dialogue is important. How to survive under these oppressive structures is what we should look at. Many young people are getting off social media because they need connection, but it is difficult to find it because capitalism has made it so. Over-focus on the nuclear family. Everyone can create an open, hospitable space. Look for examples. What do we need, what do we have?

### **Political Action**

*Julie Ward: As a former politician, I can tell you that you have to organise to be the change. It has to be a mass movement, not just as individuals. This is how to put pressure on politicians. We need trade unions (although some can be big institutions not pushing for change, but rather obsessed with their own functionality), but if trade unions for the culture sector don't exist, you have to make them, as in the case of the artists union in the UK. You cannot make change happen from the outside. Do not leave it up to politicians*



## Handle with Care | Project Agora



*The Project Agora of the Handle with Care un|conference welcomed 32 projects from across Europe that focused on different dimensions of culture and care. Participants were able to discuss and connect with project representatives, gaining inspiration and possibilities for future cooperation. Here you will find descriptions of each of the projects that took part, including the six pilot projects of the CultureForHealth project.*

### 1. [about siblings] - Greece

<https://amongtheants.wixsite.com/amongtheants>

*[about siblings] ([as])* is an innovative research and development project engaging disabled children, their non-disabled siblings, as well as a team of disabled and non-disabled creative professionals. The project will take place in an Athenian neighbourhood in collaboration with local partners and its duration is 10 days.

A team of multidisciplinary disabled and non-disabled artists, educators and health professionals will be working with approximately 15 siblings exchanging ideas of playfulness, reality, dreams and imagination. Together they will participate in creative labs. By mixing movement, sound and visual references of illustration and costume design we will create our own music as well as wearable sculptures driven by the participants' imagination.

At the heart of *[as]* is the hope to touch on the many faces of siblings' relationships with great interest on how this relationship is being nurtured when a child's sister(s) or brother(s)

experiences disability. In collaboration with the Liminal team and a team of professional artists with lived experience with disability we enter siblings' lives through meaningful acts of joy and togetherness.

Together with the artists, siblings will explore the influence of (super/anti)heros in their lives and create their own hero illustration. Siblings' heroes will inspire real life wearable sculptures created by multidisciplinary artist Nikos Koniaris. [as] activities are free, tailored & interactive. Siblings will engage in 4 creative labs culminating in a short animation documentary, a movement composition & a postcard series. [as] will conclude with an outdoor art celebration where siblings will gather in their wearable sculptures singing, dancing, or simply being there in the moment.

This learning will be used to continue working with sibling pairs living in Greece and Athens, who may feel underrepresented in the arts or experience barriers in being part of the sector as audiences or makers.

## 2. “Amoli”, A Collective Work in Rural | Post-Industrial | Multicultural Community of Aspropyrgos - Greece

<https://synergasia.wixsite.com/synergasia>

*Amoli* for the farmers of Aspropyrgos means "the groove of water that waters the agricultural crops". The project is interdisciplinary. It was created in 2016 in Aspropyrgos, Attica and since then it has been dynamically developing in the fields of art, science, energy, society and education at an international level.

It is a collective project that includes the Rural, Post-industrial, Multicultural Community of Aspropyrgos, but now the project is expanding to the whole of the Thriassio Plain. The Thriassio Plain is the plain that includes the cities: Aspropyrgos, Elefsina, Magoula and Mandra and is probably the least favoured area nationally with a major environmental problem.

The project is presented in the programme of the institution "2023 European Capital of Culture" being the official proposal of the Municipality of Aspropyrgos.

The project is presented in Elefsina and Aspropyrgos, with the participation of farmers with arvanitic origin from Aspropyrgos, Elefsina, Magoula and Mandra and includes: Walking tours of the farms, public participation in agricultural work, narratives, Arvanitic songs, performances, art installations, projections, meetings of the rural communities in order to exchange views on their pressing problems of survival, as well as presentations by the Laboratory of Soft Energy Applications and Environmental Protection of the University of West Attica (SEALAB UNIWA) on the energy transition of rural communities, thus contributing to their sustainability.

Institutions participating in the *Amoli* project:

The Municipality of Aspropyrgos, Aspropyrgos Agricultural Association, Soft Energy Applications and Environmental Protection Laboratory, Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of West Attica (SEALAB UNIWA), 2023 ΕΛΕΥΣΙΣ EUROPEAN CAPITAL of CULTURE



### 3. Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region (AoP in the BSR) - Sweden

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/arts-on-prescription/>

The *AoP in the BSR* project aims to improve the mental and social well-being of people in the Baltic Sea Region by promoting and spreading the implementation of Arts on Prescription programmes. We are developing a manual on how to implement Arts on Prescription schemes, pilot such activities in five regions and continuously improve, adapt and translate the concept. Through this project, we thrive to make Arts on Prescription programmes more financially sustainable and available to more people.

### 4. Aurora Sogna - Italy

<https://www.aurorasogna.it/>

*Aurora Sogna* is a community empowerment project that aims to create shared value and generate a positive social, economic and environmental impact in the Aurora neighbourhood (Turin, Italy). The project aims to enhance the area's cultural vibrancy by empowering individuals under 30 who reside in, work in or frequent the neighbourhood to participate in cultural project development. *Aurora Sogna* serves as a pivotal "incubator" for young people, acting as a central platform by providing them opportunities to create cultural initiatives with a strong impact on the territory. The project conducts a comprehensive programme annually from November to March, including listening sessions, training workshops and co-planning activities to achieve a sustained positive impact on the territory's cultural activities that will improve the community's well-being. This holistic approach to community development aligns with values of social, economic and environmental sustainability, ensuring a positive impact for years.

### 5. #BenefitsOfSinging Campaign - Germany/Europe

[www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/BenefitsOfSinging](http://www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/BenefitsOfSinging)

The *#BenefitsOfSinging* Campaign is an initiative of the European Choral Association to raise awareness for the benefits of collective singing for both the individual and society. On the website [www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/BenefitsOfSinging](http://www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/BenefitsOfSinging) we published the physical, psychological, educational and social benefits of singing as well as a curated database with research that proves these benefits. In addition we created visuals people can use and an advocacy kit. This campaign can help anybody who wishes to use collective singing in a project / in a specific context to prove why this would be beneficial.

### 6. Call Me Sugar - Greece

<https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/future-now-2023/call-me-sugar>

What makes a job good? How is dignity defined in the workplace? Do we share another view on sex work with regard to its online versions? Why should its choice as a source of income conceal a sad underlying story? Is this simply the male gaze or is it a conscious appropriation of the patriarchal system in favour of sex workers? *Call Me Sugar* sets out as a surrealistic performance conference centred on working conditions, sexuality, fetishism and its commodification. OnlyFans, cam girls and used underwear are the backdrop for a modular performance that will negotiate taboos, stereotypes and loneliness through the field of online sex work promising sexual and financial liberation, insatiable pleasures and

arousing images. A performance made of research material, humour, personal confessions and fictional stories.

### **7. Care: Economies of Eudaimonia - Greece**

<https://gnamamidakisfoundation.org/en/art-residency/>

A week-long research residency programme, a collective learning and caring experience, a call for creative people whose work is based on research, experimentation and collaborations. Recently inaugurated (October 2022), it took place in Crete and brought together nine cultural practitioners from different fields (curators, artist-performers, writers, historians, placemakers, researchers, cultural managers) as well as six speakers / workshop leaders (university professors, researchers, architects, performers, writers), all of whom have studied - in different and various ways - the topic of care.

Starting with the “Care Manifesto” by the Care Collective, over the course of eight days, through workshops, presentations and debates, we discussed community-led co-creative projects, case studies and empirical studies on the social organisation of care in Greece within broader interdisciplinary approaches, the crisis of social care and healthcare in Greece and abroad, the gradual shrinking of the welfare state, the refugee crisis, the pandemic and the environmental crisis, as well as the secondary traumas of carers, the lack of (their) care and ‘care-washing’.

### **8. Clowning Connects Us - Austria**

[www.clownexus.eu](http://www.clownexus.eu)

*ClowNexus* is a large-scale cooperation project co-funded by Creative Europe. From November 2020 to October 2023, eight European Healthcare Clowning Organisations are exploring the potential of arts and humour to develop social connections with two special target groups: people with dementia and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Together with the audiences, the goal is to explore moments of lightness and human connection. The art of clowning opens up spaces for humorous and creative self-expression of all those involved.

A total of six artistic laboratories (three per target group) gathered clowning artists from different European Union countries during which they learned and exchanged with invited experts and experts from experience.

From the beginning of the project, the artists met and engaged with the target groups in their local contexts. This enabled the artists to have a better understanding of the environment, social context, needs and wishes of the audiences. The co-created new artistic approaches and formats were developed through the interaction with people with dementia, children with ASD, their environments and with the collaboration of international experts. The gathered artistic tools and project learnings will be presented on the ClowNexus website towards the end of the project in October 2023.

### **9. Community Compass - Jersey, Channel Islands**

The Community Compass is a new project from the Government on the Channel Island of Jersey, aiming to reconnect our community by increasing participation in arts, culture and group physical activity.

At the core of the service is a network of Community Connectors. Working together and embedding themselves into harder to reach parts of our society, they are building an integrated map of our society, especially the less visible areas of hardship and deprivation and then commissioning new activities directly aimed at creating greater social connection and community well-being.

To date 18 Community Connectors have commissioned a diverse range of 46 activities, including line-dancing, ladies basketball, art therapy training, a youth choir, pottery making and art workshops for dementia patients.

#### **10. CoMuseum international conference - Greece**

<https://www.thecomuseum.org/>

CoMuseum is an international museum conference organised by the US Embassy, the Benaki Museum and the British Council in Greece featuring top international experts from museums and cultural institutions in Greece, the UK, the US and beyond, who share insights and ideas on the present and future of museums. Its goal is to unlock the collaborative spirit and boost the human capital of museums and cultural organisations, showcase the best ideas and practices from around the world, highlight contemporary challenges, build capacity and trust and create a global network of cultural professionals that will co-design a shared 'culture-edge' future for our societies.

CoMuseum has been running for the last 12 years in Greece (and beyond) and is recognised as a premier capacity building event for the cultural sector and the creative industries in the EU, UK and US. The hybrid conference mainly focuses on the societal side of museums and cultural organisations and explores how museums could play a core role in inclusive and sustainable development.

The CoMuseum International Conference is also the core activity of the of British Council's Museums Revisited capacity building programme for the museum sector in Europe that explores the role of museums in society

(<https://www.britishcouncil.gr/en/programmes/arts/cultural-skills/museums-revisited>)

#### **11. DE-BIAS - France/Europe**

<https://pro.europeana.eu/project/de-bias>

Cultural heritage institutions in Europe and beyond have been undertaking work to describe and catalogue the historical objects in their collections for decades. However, once created, catalogue data are rarely updated to reflect changes in language and society. As a result, many object and collection descriptions that once fit into popular social narratives now convey outdated views that not only ignore and therefore alienate a wide range of people and communities, but in some cases use language that is offensive, inappropriate or even harmful. Our *DE-BIAS* project aims to promote a more inclusive and respectful approach to the description of digital collections and the telling of stories and histories of minoritised

communities. Over the course of two years, we will develop an AI-powered tool to automatically detect problematic terms in cultural heritage metadata and provide information about their problematic background. It will use vocabularies that combine offensive language with contextual information and suggestions for appropriate terms. In addition to this tool, the *DE-BIAS* partners will develop methodologies for transfer, capacity-building and awareness-raising, for cultural organisations and policy making. Gathering 11 technological, cultural and research partners (including 3 Culture Action Europe members) from seven European countries, the *DE-BIAS* project is funded by the Digital Europe Programme and will run until 2024.

### **12. Emergency Smile - Austria**

<https://emergencysmile.rednoses.org/>

*Emergency Smile* (ES) is a programme implemented by RED NOSES International (RNI) in different crisis settings that aims to enable joy and promote the emotional well-being and resilience of children and youth affected by crisis and their support systems.

The main intervention of the ES Programme is the ES Missions. In a mission a transnational group of specially trained Clown Artists, together with a Head of Mission; develop a holistic intervention in a crisis setting by applying a portfolio of artistic formats, to reach audiences in different ways.

People affected by crisis require special care. They usually receive the immediate aid to survive, but frequently their emotional and mental well-being is overlooked.

We help people reconnect with joyful emotions in order to rekindle hope, transform their focus by concentrating on positive aspects of life and show them that life still has happiness in store for them.

Since 2016 we have had more than 20 missions in Greece, with a special focus on people in exile on Lesbos, Samos and Greece Mainland.

### **13. Eyes of Light - Arts in Health Hub - Greece**

<https://www.eyesoflight.gr/en/>

*Eyes of Light - Arts in Health Hub* is a non-profit organisation founded in 2019 in Athens, with the mission of improving the quality of life of cancer patients through art. Its beneficiaries are adults with cancer and their families, from Athens and all over Greece and it collaborates with patient support organisations from Greece and abroad.

*Eyes of Light* was created to contribute to a more humane treatment of the disease, through the innovative field of Arts in Health, which focuses on the “well-being” of the patient. The organisation’s projects are designed based on international studies that prove the positive impact of art on oncology patients. They aim to meet the needs of psychological support (e.g. boosting self-esteem, managing emotions, reducing anxiety and depression) and social support (e.g. reducing isolation and stigma, improving social functioning).

Our core activities include: a) internationally recognised therapeutic photography workshops, b) participatory art projects and workshops that connect patients and artists, c) a cultural prescription programme “Connect with Art” which includes visits to exhibitions, museum tours and activities to bring patients in contact with art, d) art programmes within healthcare settings.

#### **14. inter-GENER8ions - Greece**

In the context of the diploma thesis for the faculty of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens, the conditions of the coexistence between an intergenerational community and the cultural community are investigated for the formation of a mixed-use neighbourhood in the ex-industrial complex of “Kronos” at Elefsina’s coastline.

Having collected data for the population of Elefsina and the significant variety of all ages that coexist in its neighbourhoods, this project attempts to answer the question of how a new daily community life can be defined based on the coexistence of different age groups. Children, adults and elderly people live together and meet up with their needs for work, creative activities, play, recreation and care with the constant presence of artistic activities. . The aim is to identify the qualitative characteristics of the community based on participation and contribution that provides its members with the sense of belonging.

#### **15. Liquid Dependencies - Netherlands**

<https://liquiddependencies.substack.com/>

Liquid Dependencies is a Live-Action-Role Playing game, in which players simulate and rehearse life in a society that is socio-economically structured to support decentralised, long-term and mutually caring relationships, with a focus on relationships that fall outside the bounds of traditional kinships such as marriage, working relationships, blood-ties and direct quid-pro quo exchange.

Over the course of an afternoon 8-12 players spend a life-time in the society, called ReUnion, building a character, dealing with unexpected societal and personal events that affect the group as a whole or single players, all the while managing their time, money, energy and social safety nets, working towards a common goal of establishing long-term caring relationships and building community. ReUnion uses a relationship driven currency called Mutual Coin to support the members of the society in caring for themselves and each other. The game serves as a way to test a complex socio-economic system that allows participants to experience the pitfalls and successes of life in a decentralised caring society in a safe and engaging way, making connections between the life they build in the game and their daily lives.

The game was launched at the Shanghai Biennale in 2021 and has since then had over 50 sessions in China and across Europe, including Framer Framed in Amsterdam, Van Abbe Museum, Temporary Gallery Cologne and Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig. Each localisation generates its own version as we translate the game both linguistically and culturally to reflect the lives of the local players and grow its content from their experience and input. As the game has grown, the community of players has begun to establish their own care networks based on their in-game experience and we are working to develop more

broadly accessible versions, ultimately working towards a fully fledged educational system that uses LARP, art and design to teach people and support them in building their own decentralised care networks.

#### **16. Malopolska. Empathetic Culture (Polish: Małopolska. Kultura Wrażliwa) - Poland**

<https://kulturawrazliwa.pl>

*Malopolska. Empathetic Culture* is a project that has become a regular programme. It has been conducted since 2016 when it started as a dedicated project for improving accessibility of 23 regional cultural institutions in Malopolska, Poland. By inviting non-governmental organisations, it has developed a mighty model of improving accessibility of any public space, including culture sector. However, it moved its focus from the needs of people with disabilities and highlighted that we shall be open to diverse and various needs of people visiting our institutions. Moreover, it emphasised that accessibility will not be successful if we won't let others create those cultural spaces together with us.

It provides then not only practical solutions, but inspires cultural, social and educational policies, both at political, but also at strategic level.

The programme gathers a great number of best practices available online. It is well-recognised in our region where it impacts 3.4 million citizens living here. For the last three years, it has also impacted national strategies of dealing with accessibility. Furthermore, in 2022, it raised issues of diversity in culture education at the European level, by way of an advocacy visit to Brussels as well as the English publication: "The art of diversity in Culture Education" (available also in Ukrainian).

#### **17. Man is Space: Vitić Dances - Croatia**

<https://bacaci-sjenki.hr/en/projekti/hrvatski-vitic-plese/>

<http://viticplese.blogspot.com/>

'Man is Space: Vitić Dances' is a multiyear community art project in a 10-story condominium building block in Zagreb, Croatia. Built by the architect Ivo Vitić, the building, considered a masterpiece of modern architecture and registered as a national monument (since 2005), was in a deteriorated state that threatened the lives of its 256 inhabitants and passer-by. The project started in 2003 when Croatian artist Boris Bakal (and his artistic company - Shadow Casters) moved into the building and became deeply acquainted with its history, its tenants and their everyday hardship. The artist aimed to raise the awareness of the tenants and local community to restore this iconic building through a complex interdisciplinary endeavour that combined permanent artistic and social interventions and programmes in and around the building. This 'artivism' project re-created and socialised a commonly shared space through intensive artistic presence by unifying tenants to collaborate for its preservation. It allows us to move away from a notion of the building as a whole to a notion of the building as multiplicity, from the study of the urban neighbourhood to the study of urban choreographies of architecture. Vitić Dances has also secured funds to restore the building's facade and record/create a documentary film about this project and the building. Indeed, restoration started in February 2016 and constitutes a significant investment, funded partly by the City of Zagreb, in residential housing in Croatia, since World War II. It was finished in May 2018 and



the feature documentary film by Boris Bakal, following the whole process of activating and changing the local community, had a world premiere in Zagreb at the international festival ZGDOX on 1 April 2023.

[http://zagrebdox.net/en/2023/programme/official\\_program/state\\_of\\_affairs/vitic\\_dances](http://zagrebdox.net/en/2023/programme/official_program/state_of_affairs/vitic_dances)  
<https://www.dokumentarni.net/2023/04/07/19-zagrebdox-vitic-plese-ples-protiv-sustava/>

#### **18. Melisma: an outreach project by the Greek National Opera - Greece**

<https://www.nationalopera.gr/en/learning-participation/gno-educational-social-activities/item/4881-melisma>

Melisma is the new year-long cycle of educational and artistic activities for people of all ages introduced by the GNO Learning & Participation Department. It started in June 2022 in the wider region of Northern Evia that has been severely affected by the unprecedented wildfires of summer 2021.

The project focuses on man's relationship with the natural environment and includes a series of experiential artistic workshops of theatrical expression and creative writing, music, movement, dance and visual arts. In the first stage, each workshop will aim at familiarising participants with the key concepts and techniques of each respective art form in order to provide the participants with the necessary strengthening tools to redefine their relationship with the natural environment and the traditions that derive from it for the community.

In the second stage, the fertile dialogue and the collaboration between the different art forms will lead to the creation of an original music theatre performance. The performance will be mounted for the first time in Evia in summer 2023, while in September of that same year it will also be presented at the GNO Alternative Stage in the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center.

#### **19. Mental Health Arts Festival Bonds - Lithuania**

<https://www.facebook.com/Rysiaifest/>

One in four people experience mental health difficulties every year and the figure is rising. Despite the fact that it can be experienced or encountered in a domestic environment by almost everyone, discrimination and stigma around mental difficulties are widespread thus affecting the quality of life and preventing timely access to help or treatment.

Through a diverse programme involving music, film, performance art, theatre, dance, literature and visual art, *Lithuanian Mental Health Arts Festival* seeks to engage decision makers, mental health specialists, service users and broader society in a dialogue on what kind of mental health care we strive to create. We strongly believe that the answer involves culture, social care, education and other non-medical sectors, active communities and grassroots movements.

The festival aims to encourage new cultural production around the topic of mental health, develop skills for cultural workers to engage in health through creative methods, find new forms of partnerships between (mental) healthcare and culture sectors and evaluate these partnerships on their effects on reducing mental health related stigma and improving well-being.

The festival programme is created with strong commitment to social activism, building partnerships between the arts institutions (including but not limited to National Arts Gallery, Mo museum), individual artists with lived experience of mental health issues or otherwise engaged in the topic of health, mental health care institutions and specialists, academics and human rights organisations and movements. The programme is created with artistic and educational purpose in mind. It consists of the artistic programme and is followed by reflections (in a form of discussion or a workshop). The festival also has a radio show that applies the same approach to the programming of radio talks.

The success of the first *Lithuanian Mental Health Arts Festival* shows that while mental health topics in Lithuanian society are still severely stigmatised and largely unknown, the chosen measures - interdisciplinary art forms, workshops, discussions involving mental health professionals and general society - are a suitable means for mental health promotion and challenging of stigma. The festival seeks to become a social justice movement that celebrates the creativity and diversity of the minds, while adding to the human rights approach to mental health care in the Baltic region.

#### **20. MuseIT - Multisensory, User-centred, Shared cultural Experiences through Interactive Technologies - Europe**

<https://www.muse-it.eu/>

*MuseIT* stands for Multisensory, User-centred, Shared cultural Experiences through Interactive Technologies. Our project aims to co-design and develop an inclusive multisensory platform with interactive technologies for people with disabilities to have enriched engagement with cultural assets and experiences. The technologies we will develop are namely: a toolkit of multi-sensory technologies including Virtual Reality for cultural immersive experiences and a remote musical co-creation platform. With these technologies, we want to widen access to cultural experiences and cultural heritage for people with disabilities.

Beyond the development of technologies, the MuseIT partners will develop methodologies for transfer, capacity-building and awareness-raising, addressed to cultural organisations, policymakers and civil society, with the aim of supporting the change of narratives on disability.

To carry this ambition, the project relies on an international multidisciplinary partnership bringing together organisations (including 1 CAE member) from 10 countries from Europe and beyond from cultural, technological, research and user communities. MuseIT runs from 2022 to 2025 and is co-funded by the Horizon Europe programme of the European Commission.

#### **21. Museum Educator Assistants (museum training programme for adults aged 65+) - Greece**

<https://antama.gr/ekpaideftiko-programma-65-plus>

The aim of the programme is to familiarise adults 65+ with museum education and with methods of working with children in museums and to involve them in voluntary museum



projects as assistant museum educators. It builds on the long tradition of the Hellenic Children's Museum's adult training programme for museum educators, which has been operating since 1989 (the oldest training programme in Greece on museum education), adding the element of active community involvement to enhance individual and social well-being. The project was designed and implemented with ANTAMA, a social enterprise that aims to combat ageism and empower older adults to participate in social life, in order to reach the target group and create a strong interdisciplinary team to support all cognitive, social and emotional needs of the programme participants.

The programme includes 10 weeks of theoretical training and a 12-week practicum in the exhibition areas and educational programmes of the Hellenic Children's Museum, where trainees understand experientially and in collaboration with the current Museum Educators how museum spaces and collections can be used as an educational, cultural and skills development tool. In addition to the cognitive objectives, the programme enables participants to come into contact with new people (young and old) and create friendships, thus remaining socially and physically active and strengthening intergenerational relationships by offering children visiting the museum the joy of interacting with elders. The first round of the programme, with 15 participants, is running from October 2022-May 2023 with the financial support of the charitable Foundation TIMA. Participants are already involved in various mainstream activities of the museum e.g. they will design and implement all activities scheduled for the celebration of the International Day of Museums 2023 at the Hellenic Children's Museum, thus promoting the idea of active involvement in cultural life and intergenerational learning in the community.

## **22. PerFare - Performing arts to promote social welfare access in Europe - Europe** [www.perfare.eu](http://www.perfare.eu)

PERFARE promotes social inclusion for those audience groups that are marginalised due to psychological and/or physical health issues and/or because belonging to minorities, through the fruition of cultural activities and performing arts initiatives.

The project, which will last a total of 36 months (from June 2022 to May 2025), has the two specific objectives. Firstly, to innovate the partners' organisations creative models in order to make welfare services (i.e. health and well-being) an integral part of their artistic work; and secondly to facilitate the access to performing art experiences for audience groups with psychological and/or physical health conditions by systemizing collaboration opportunities among cultural-creative actors and the welfare sector.

## **23. Refugee Week Greece - Greece** <https://refugeeweek.gr/>

*Refugee Week* is an arts and culture festival that happens every year in June, across Greece, that aims to celebrate the creativity, contribution and resilience of people who have experienced forced migration. It is a cultural festival that is designed, curated and organised by the community, including artists, civil society, refugees and aid workers. This initiative is an opportunity for everyone to participate in events, activities and workshops that promote the message of solidarity, inclusion and social equality.

*Refugee Week Greece* is a platform that encourages collaboration among various stakeholders to create a positive message for vulnerable groups through culture and community engagement. The goal is to inspire change in our everyday lives and work towards more inclusive societies. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it is essential to widen our circles of compassion and extend it to all our human neighbours and our shared home, planet Earth. We provide opportunities for skill-building and personal growth, as well as create social connections and support networks among participants. This can be especially valuable for refugees and people seeking refuge, who may be navigating new environments and facing various challenges.

Overall, the *Refugee Week Greece* initiative plays a crucial role in promoting accessibility and inclusion in the arts by empowering individuals and communities, fostering cultural exchange and understanding and creating opportunities for diverse voices and perspectives to be heard and celebrated.

#### 24. Qisetna - UK

[www.qisetna.com](http://www.qisetna.com)

An inspiring project giving a platform to Syrians living in the diaspora across Europe and beyond. Through participatory storytelling workshops with a unique methodology, we have created an inclusive and safe space where newcomers meet with local residents and all together share stories of a treasure. Through different exercises, they become aware of their breathing, body scanning, gaining confidence and preparing themselves for a unique performance presented to the community.

#### 25. Urban Exoticism - Greece

The *Urban Exoticism* project constitutes a theoretical exploration of the complex questions of gentrification, cultural appropriation and the postcolonial notion of exoticism in the context of modern urban life. Focusing on Athens, a city shaped by a tumultuous history and multifarious cultural exchanges, the project invites participants to engage with the city's peculiarities and hidden realities and to reflect critically on the ways in which cultural practices and traditions are appropriated and commodified in the process of urban development.

Through its emphasis on the marginalised and neglected places of the city, *Urban Exoticism* seeks to challenge the dominant narratives of urban regeneration, which often result in the displacement of local communities and the erasure of cultural heritage. By recontextualising the original phenomenon of the nineteenth-century's notion of exoticism in the modern metropolis, the project sheds light on the ways in which Western discourses of cultural identity and authenticity are implicated in processes of gentrification and cultural homogenisation.

Ultimately, the *Urban Exoticism* project serves as a discursive tool for critical reflection and dialogue on the complex issues of urban development and cultural identity. It invites participants to engage with the local community and cultural heritage and to consider the ways in which their own perspectives and practices are shaped by broader social and historical forces. Through its emphasis on the diversity and complexity of the modern

metropolis, *Urban Exoticism* offers a valuable contribution to ongoing debates about the role of culture and identity in contemporary urban life.

The project has taken the form of two successful photography workshops, which brought together international students of photography to explore the unique visual culture of Athens and Berlin. Through a series of immersive workshops, tutoring and critical discussions, the participants were encouraged to engage with the city's complex history and cultural identity and to produce a body of work that reflects their own perspectives and interpretations of the urban landscape. The resulting photographs were presented in two contemporary art exhibitions in Athens and Berlin. Through its combination of critical reflection and creative expression, the *Urban Exoticism* project offers a powerful example of the potential of art and culture to foster cross-cultural dialogue and understanding and to challenge dominant narratives of urban development and cultural identity.

### **26. Vzw KAOS - Belgium**

<https://www.vzwkaos.be>

KAOS develops art projects with artists who may or may not be psychologically vulnerable and has an artists in residency programme in psychiatry. It brings art and psychiatry together and tells something about the perception of this.

Where historically a distinction arose between so-called outsider and insider art, KAOS resolutely chooses to ignore this distinction in the development of their projects. The starting point is the quality of the work in combination with the trajectory and the themes of the artists they work with.

As in the arts field, we notice that the boundaries between psychiatry and non-psychiatry are becoming more fluid. However, there are still many prejudices about people who suffer from mental vulnerability and through our projects KAOS wants to challenge these and contribute to a process of destigmatisation.

### **27. We Want to Help ... How? / TGR The Green Room - Germany**

<https://www.thegreenroomforartists.de/blog/we-want-to-help-how>

The presentation: "We want to help ... How?" offers our experiences in assisting refugee and dissident artists in The Green Room in 2022.

The Green Room is a centre in Cologne, Germany, that provides a wide range of support systems for performing artists. Since our founding in 2020, we had been responding to performing artists' personal crises, e.g. injury, illness, burnout, loss of work, as well as the difficult challenges arising from the pandemic and its long shadow into cultural patterns and societal structures.

During the first days of Russia's war against Ukraine, we cautiously sent out messages: "We want to help ... How?".

Within 24-hours of the first message, over forty Ukrainian artists responded. Their responses challenged our assumptions on what programmes, systems and structures can help artists

facing grave societal and personal crises. In 2022, we assisted over 120 Ukrainian performing artists along with several Russian dissident artists. These high-stakes therapeutic interventions provided us with valuable insights into the potentials for artistic healing and community-building.

The Green Room's programmes are based on the "bio-psycho-social-(spiritual)" model of health advocated since the 1970s by the World Health Organization (WHO). We offer psychological and career counselling and courses and workshops designed to support performing artists' somatic and psycho-emotional health. We also advocate for artists' rights and well-being. Our work with Ukrainian artists in extreme situations as new refugees expanded and clarified our views on the possibilities for artistic work to create positive therapeutic feedback loops between the artists and the communities that emerged to support them and benefit from their artistic offerings. We began setting up more and more opportunities for free artistic expressions and exchanges. In this situation, our roles as health practitioners evolved away from being providers of active interventions. Instead, we learned how to build effective frameworks and contexts for the artists and their communities that could empower, support and contribute to meaningful engagements with each other. We found that this type of scaffolding enabled the artists to create their own therapeutic communities and contexts that were perhaps more effective in this context than our traditional therapeutic services.

This presentation explores aspects of agile and responsive leadership in cultural settings, particularly those responding to dire societal crises. We explore how conducive cultural settings assist artists develop expressions with the potential to heal. We focus on the role of cultural managers as facilitators, creating optimal conditions for artists to flourish.

## **CultureForHealth Projects**

The six projects supported by the CultureForHealth project were also present at the Handle With Care Project Agora. More about the projects can be found on the [CultureForHealth project website](#) and in the [CultureForHealth Compendium](#).

### **28. Culture in Hospitals - Denmark**

This project was implemented by the University Hospital of Aarhus and the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus/Aalborg.

Culture in Hospitals was an initiative to promote arts and health in hospitals, including the existing projects of patient-tailored live music in intensive wards. It brought together culture and healthcare to promote a more holistic healthcare environment. The project explored the experience of patient-tailored live music interventions in the ICU and found that this initiative was beneficial for patients, relatives, healthcare professionals, musicians and the institutions involved.

The design of the project was based on purposive sampling and multiple methods with regard to data collection and evaluation.

A total of 27 patients participated in the study from February 2020 to December 2021. The qualitative component consisted of participant observation and interviews with patients. This data was analysed using the software programme NVivo 12. The quantitative component of the study consisted of pre-post measurements of heart rate, blood pressure, the patient's subjective experience of pain and heart rate variability. This data was analysed using the programme STATA with descriptive statistics, paired t-test and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test.

In the morning the musicians met the nurse in charge of the initial briefing of the day's schedule. Then the musicians performed for the healthcare professionals in the coffee room, after which the musicians offered 1-to-1 patient-tailored bedside music sessions in the individual patients' rooms.

As a result of this project, the high-level management of Aarhus University Hospital and of the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus respectively, have entered into a partnership agreement with the aim of strengthening and extending their cooperation through scientific research and the possibility for music students to do their BAKA projects as well as their internship in different wards in the hospital in the elective course Music & Health

### **29. Culture Together - Art and Culture in Nursing Homes - Denmark**

The project was implemented by Mapia, a private consulting company with expertise in dementia and Den Gamle By, an open air museum in Aarhus, Denmark.

Arts and Culture in Nursing Homes aimed to improve the quality of life of people with dementia living in care homes. The project involved a collaboration between six arts and culture institutions and Mapia, due to their expertise in dementia. Mapia investigated to what extent the implementation of art and culture could contribute positively to the quality of life of nursing home residents with dementia, potentially reducing the use of antipsychotic drugs. The project recognised the importance of arts and culture in improving both the quality of health and quality of life for people with dementia.

Each cultural actor, in collaboration with Mapia, developed an activity specifically designed for the most vulnerable elderly individuals in the country's nursing homes. The duration of each activity was between 30 minutes and an hour. The method was developed, tested and continuously adjusted. Throughout the process, the activity at nursing homes was supervised by Mapia.

### **30. Inclusion of Art in Businesses and Companies - Slovenia**

This project was implemented by Društvo Asociacija in Slovenia. The local partners were Ravnikar Gallery Space, Radio Študent, Lokal Patriot, Zavod Sploh, City of Women, Nomad Dance Academy, Forum Ljubljana, Glej Theatre and Emanat. The project was supported by the Slovenian Ministry of Public Administration.

One of the main areas of interest of Društvo Asociacija is the connection between art and business. This pilot continues a previous project – Certifikat Kulturno podjetje, which translates as Certificate Culture Friendly Enterprise – which ended in January 2022. Within that project, the cultural organisation developed a certificate system (similar to, for example,

the Fairtrade certificate) to stimulate the inclusion of art in businesses. This successful experience, research and models, inspired the design of pilots within the CultureForHealth project, which looked at various ways to include culture in companies while also benefiting both sectors with the goal of strengthening the well-being of employees.

The pilot project involved the participation of 23 employees from three different companies who took part in the full three-part programme of diverse cultural activities, including art installations and interventions in the workplace, contemporary dance workshops and creative collaborative residencies.

By applying three models incorporating art into business, the project evaluated not only the potential contribution of art to the well-being of employees but also what specific formats are most likely to achieve positive benefits (and, in that case, which ones). These models tested if reinforcing creativity in the workplace would increase the well-being of the employees via 1) a series of contemporary dance workshops, 2) creative residencies/workshops (theatre, musical improvisation, comic book creation) and 3) the placement of artistic work (graphics, music) in the premises of businesses. The contribution of these activities to the promotion of well-being was tested by a pre-survey/self-evaluation and a post-survey.

Although the analysis of the pre- and post-surveys is still ongoing, it is possible to report on some initial findings. One of the most revealing results from the pre-survey is that there is a large share of participating individuals who have never attended the theatre (39% of respondents) or visited museums and galleries (22%) or actively participated in activities such as dance (39%). Interestingly, respondents who visit art events more frequently score higher in terms of overall life satisfaction. Almost half of the participants (47%) had no prior experience of participation in any kind of creative activities.

And yet, when asked about their expectations for the upcoming activities, none mentioned an expected impact on health, despite the fact that they had reported a moderate level of back pain, lack of sleep and fatigue. The most commonly expressed expectations were getting to know their colleagues better, entertainment and spending pleasurable time with coworkers.

### **31. Mind the Gap - Slovakia**

This project was implemented by Stanica (Truc sphérique), a member of Trans Europe Halles, in Slovakia.

Cultural centre Stanica (Truc sphérique), organised a series of three Mixability Workshops. These workshops brought together stakeholders from different local cultural organisations and the social field to discuss and map the current situation regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities in the activities of cultural institutions in Slovakia. Participants defined core values, shared best practices and discussed suggestions for reducing barriers in cultural institutions. The workshops also explored opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration aimed at improving cultural initiatives and broadening discussions on cultural accessibility.

Until now, cultural institutions have typically focused on actions targeted at specific disability groups. However, this project introduced and explored the concept of mixability - opening



cultural activities to all people, regardless of their disability and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration among stakeholders from various fields of expertise (e.g. experts working with people with mobility impairments, autistic individuals, blind and partially sighted people, people with mental disabilities, psychiatric patients, excluded groups, people living in extreme poverty and representatives of theatres, music orchestras, libraries, cultural centres and galleries, cultural activists and so on).

The project led to the creation of a written manual on inclusion. The manual aims to inspire cultural organisers and operators who wish to implement more inclusive cultural programmes. It is primarily intended for beginners in this field.

### **32. Group Singing for Maternal Mental Health - Romania**

This project was implemented by Cluj Cultural Centre in Cluj-Napoca, Romania in partnership with the World Health Organisation and University College London.

The goal of this pilot project was to explore to what extent Music and Motherhood (a clinically effective group singing intervention for new mums in the UK) needed to be adapted to meet local needs. In this way, the project investigated the feasibility of implementation and its impact on the mental health and well-being of participants in Romania.

Group singing for maternal mental health aims to alleviate symptoms of depression; support participants in transforming negative emotions and negative self-perception; help participants to experience positive emotions; support cathartic release; facilitate the establishment of peer support; and reinforce mother-infant bonding. Mothers attend these sessions together with their babies under the facilitation of a music lead. This allows them to share experiences and receive support from the group, as well as sing and engage in simple music-making activities.

In Cluj-Napoca, the research project involved two groups. Two singing groups were organised, one for Romanian-speaking mothers and another one for Hungarian-speaking mothers. In total, 15 new Romanian and Hungarian-speaking mothers who were experiencing symptoms of postpartum depression participated in a ten-week group singing intervention facilitated by professional singing leaders.

The research conducted as part of the intervention suggests that participation in the singing group significantly benefited the mothers in question.

The scores for postnatal depression (measured on the EPDS – Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale) decreased and the scores indicating well-being (WHO-5 – Well-Being Index) and perceived social support (MSPSS – Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support) increased among the women in our pilot intervention. The changes in scores were large enough to achieve statistical significance.

### **33. Social Well-being Laboratories - Italy**

This project was implemented by Associazione Oltre (AO), a member of Trans Europe Halles (TEH), in Italy.

Children, especially among disadvantaged communities, with a migration background, with physical disabilities, or from families with a low income, tend to be more isolated and with fewer opportunities to socialise between each other and with adults. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the problem even further, leading to more mental health problems.

In this context, the aim of the project is to empower the relational skills of those categories of society that are often overlooked when designing cities and its services. It focuses on prevention of negative health outcomes as well as health promotion, working on the development of youth and intergenerational connections.

Associazione Oltre in Bologna initiated a project to promote intergenerational social well-being through participatory arts and culture. The project consists of a series of social well-being laboratories in the form of arts and crafts workshops across various neighbourhoods in the city. The social well-being laboratories aim to support the social well-being of children in disadvantaged communities, youth and intergenerational relations and is targeted at middle childhood to adolescence.

The project consisted of several "laboratories" in various public spaces outside the city centre, including parks and piazzas, to bring children and adults together around creative activities. The participants of the laboratories co-designed and co-produced the props, costumes, scenographies, resulting in a participative parade which takes place each year in Bologna.

The project started from an arts and crafts parade (with 10-20,000 people) in which mostly young adults and the local artistic communities participate. It also contained more than twenty arts and crafts workshops in various neighbourhoods of the city. Three workshops were selected for monitoring and study to assess their effects on participants' health and well-being. The project also included four workshops with stakeholders (ten organisations) and four workshops with 100 participants from the previously identified target groups (SWL). The project created a stakeholder map, produced a prognosis report and generated a final report with a social well-being matrix prototype.

All children involved had a positive experience. The long-term impact of the experience was variable and influenced by the socioeconomic and environmental conditions of their origin. However, the experience tends to "settle down" as memorable and thereby to develop further likelihood of participating in artistic/cultural activities, even when the family of origin is not used to spending their free time in such a way. An effect was also seen on social interactions and on the construction of relationships (among children and participating families), which in some cases also implies a better attendance of individuals from urban contexts that usually do not participate.



## Handle with care: Envisioning a Culture of Care

During the un|conference, participants gathered in circles of care to discuss key issues related to culture and care. There were eight circles on the following topics:

1. Care and Mental Health (Host: Niels Righolt)
2. Care and Youth (Host: Stefan Gies)
3. Communities of Care (Host: Ines Camara)
4. Curating Care (Host: Julie Ward)
5. Care for Culture (and cultural workers) (Host: Mateja Lazar)
6. Care for Climate (Host: Celia Grau)
7. Care for Commons (Host: Nicholas Anastasopoulos)
8. Care and Borders (Host: Burak Sayin)



The outcomes of these discussions between diverse practitioners, organisations and institutions, policy-makers, thinkers, researchers, activists and artists from the cultural, social and health sectors fed into the development of the Elefsina Manifesto | Handle with care: Envisioning a Culture of Care.

## **A Culture of Care**

In recognition of the transformative power of Culture and its potential to shape a more compassionate and inclusive world, we, the undersigned, unite under the banner of care. This manifesto serves as a rallying call to artists, cultural organisations and professionals to embrace a politics and ethics of care as a fundamental element of our collective work.

We firmly believe that care is a universal human need that too often remains overlooked and undervalued. Care as a social concept, based on empathic and appreciative interactions, has the transformative potential to create a more compassionate and interconnected society.

Thus, we assume the responsibility to champion care as a cornerstone of our endeavours, bridging societal gaps, promoting solidarity, and challenging the prevailing inequalities that afflict our communities. By prioritising care, we envision a world where empathy, compassion, and a sense of interconnectedness can flourish.

## **Eleusis 2023: The Spirit of the Place**

The ancient city of Eleusis, one of the most important sacred cities of antiquity, home to the Eleusinian Mysteries, to Demeter, Hades and Persephone, provides the perfect setting for this Manifesto. Persephone's descent into darkness and subsequent transformation is an inspiration to its authors that have drawn from the contribution of 185 participants of the 2023 Beyond The Obvious Conference 'Handle With Care - Culture for Social Well-Being' in Elefsina, Greece.

By curating care into our narratives, embracing diversity, promoting inclusivity, and amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups, we plant the seeds of empathy and foster a society where every individual feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

## **To Care is to Act**

Implementing a politics and ethics of care demands deliberate and intentional strategies from cultural organisations. We declare our unwavering dedication to the pursuit of a culture of care. Together, we envision a future where care is the guiding force that shapes our collective destiny.

We must work with determination to meet the many challenges of our time:

### **I. Care for Climate**

We, as human beings, recognise our interconnectedness with all beings and the intricate web of systems that sustain life on our ancient planet. Our actions today shape the path for future generations, and our ability to transform the world has brought us to a critical moment. The climate crisis is not only a crisis of science, technology or financial resources – it is a crisis of care. To avert catastrophe, care must be at the forefront of our efforts, transcending boundaries from the personal to the global. Culture is a vital resource for this global work of care, providing the foundation for transformative action. By fostering transnational institutions, alliances, and networks based on interdependency and democracy, we can enact a politics of care on a global scale.

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As Culture Action Europe, we are committed to working towards a regenerative future, in a world capable of sustaining and nourishing all forms of life.

By fostering environmental consciousness through cultural expressions, we can promote global care for the planet and inspire local collective action towards environmental sustainability.

By adopting sustainable practices and advocating for climate action, our cultural organisations can lead by example.

By rediscovering the extraordinary scales of time and space in which our planet and species evolved, we rediscover our shared responsibility in caring for the world we will leave to future generations.

## **II. Care and Borders**

We recognise that we are all formed, through and by our interdependencies - our survival and our thriving are always contingent on others. A caring politics must acknowledge the challenges of our shared dependence, providing us with a sense of our common humanity, enabling us to confront our shared fears and giving us the capacity to accept the complexity of our human interactions.

Recognising the current environmental sustainability challenges that our mobility brings, we must never stop crossing our borders, we must never stop nurturing connections, and we must never stop dismantling barriers if we are to envision a world where care may know no bounds.

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As Culture Action Europe, we are committed to changing the narrative, envisioning mobility as a project in itself by continuing to promote understanding, empathy, and dialogue across borders.

By creating spaces that celebrate diversity, we can ensure that the faintest of voices is heard, challenging xenophobia and discrimination.

By supporting those who flee zones of conflict, repression, and censorship, we cultivate a culture of care that safeguards all voices, preserves diverse expressions, and enriches our societies.

We challenge the divisive nature of our borders by advocating for a culture of care that transcends physical and ideological boundaries, and we embrace the need to move across borders as an essential part of our work as artists, researchers, activists and organisers.

We believe this ability to give access and to be given access, to share and to connect, is the very foundation of our common European project and a never-ending source of inspiration.

## **III. Care for the Commons**

The commons are a sphere of tangible and intangible resources vital for the reproduction of life. Cultural heritage, knowledge, and resources are an essential part of this commons that must also be protected and shared as a living expression of humanity's place in the world. In the face of urgent environmental and socioeconomic challenges, we must establish forms of governance, processes, and ethics to defend and care for the commons.

We recognise that cultural organisations have a special responsibility in preserving and promoting our cultural commons, ensuring equitable access and participation.

But we also recognise that this responsibility must extend far beyond the limits where our material and immaterial heritage are inscribed. It must encompass our social and economic commons and our work towards a more caring and democratic society.

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Culture Action Europe has a crucial role to play in promoting care for the commons through advocacy, supporting policy-making and empowering initiatives.

By fostering collaborations, sharing resources, and nurturing collective ownership, we can build resilient cultural ecosystems that prioritise care and sustainability.

By resourcing and expanding public spaces as a commons accessible to all, we can foster conviviality, interconnections and the re-emergence of communal life.

#### **IV. Communities of Care**

For decades, a relentless acceleration has pushed us towards extreme forms of individualism and competition, cornering us into a fast-paced state of loneliness.

Addressing the barriers and power imbalances that prevent both communities and individuals from feeling welcome in cultural organisations is crucial to overcome this.

Communities are at the heart of care, and culture can play a central role in fostering these inclusive and supportive networks. Cultural organisations create resilient communities that address inequalities and uplift marginalised voices through engagement, participation, intergenerational care and solidarity.

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Culture Action Europe is committed to becoming itself a true community of care by connecting a wide network of organisations, artists, professionals and researchers through a shared vision of the central place of Culture in our European project.

By working to open up spaces and institutions to all communities, transforming daily-used spaces and community events into arts and cultural spaces, we can break barriers between institutions and their audiences.

By valuing communities' cultural resources and artistic production, we can transform public spaces into common spaces that foster connection and solidarity, providing tangible opportunities for connection and mutual aid, deepening our democracies and promoting the overall well-being of individuals and communities.

By going beyond straightforward but deceptive solutions and instead engaging in active community participation, actively listening, connecting, and making visible the often-overlooked members of society, and providing real access and opportunity to disadvantaged communities.

By listening to, mentoring and connecting our members with each other and with the wider world.

#### **V. Care and Mental Health**

We recognise our current mental health emergency, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cultural organisations are crucial in initiating open and liberating conversations about our well-being, promoting mental health awareness, and providing safe spaces for self-expression, connection and healing.

By prioritising care for mental health and fostering social cohesion through cultural participation, we can contribute to a society that values and supports individual and collective well-being. Culture has, in fact, an essential role to play in addressing this poor



mental health, not just as an add-on to existing medical treatments but as proven effective healthcare responses in their own right.

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Culture Action Europe is particularly committed to the active role of Culture and the arts in the prevention and treatment of mental health conditions.

By working closely with health professionals and health institutions, cultural professionals and organisations can bridge these two worlds, fostering new practices of care where care is most needed.

Furthermore, by engaging with creativity, self-expression and social connection, schools and youth organisations can foster a culture of care that promotes well-being and mental health from an early age, preventing the onset of a number of mental health issues in a whole generation.

Mainstreaming a culture of care in our educational systems would reverse today's in-balance between prevention and treatment, challenging stigmas surrounding mental health and alleviating suffering for countless individuals in our future communities.

By prioritising mental health care, fostering collaboration between cultural and healthcare sectors, and integrating mental well-being into education, we can build a society that values individual and collective mental health, leveraging culture's transformative power for the well-being of all.

## **VI. Care and Youth**

Young people deserve a culture of care that uplifts and empowers them, recognising their agency, their potential, and the central importance of their mental well-being. Cultural organisations must prioritise their needs and aspirations, embracing a model of creating for, with, and by our youngsters on their own terms.

By fostering intergenerational dialogue, and providing spaces for co-creation and co-decision in an environment where both young minds and older generations can flourish, we can cultivate resilient communities and nurture the artists, the audiences, and the cultural professionals of the future.

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Culture Action Europe understands that a commitment to a culture of care for young people is the only way to move towards a better, more sustainable future.

This commitment should encompass a renewed focus on intergenerational dialogue, making it a fundamental and standardised practice in cultural practices and institutions.

This commitment should mobilise the broadest possible circle of care, encouraging institutions, artists and professionals to recognise the existential challenge of engaging with their future audiences, artists and professionals.

## **VII. Care for the Work of Culture**

To build an authentic culture of care, cultural organisations must lead by example. We must implement a politics and ethics of care within our own institutions, challenging existing structures and nurturing a culture of care through active engagement. By valuing the well-being of cultural workers, sharing decision-making power, and providing support for their professional development, we create a sustainable and thriving cultural sector.

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Culture Action Europe has been an unwavering voice, throughout the years, in defence of our sector as a whole and of our workers, professionals and artists as a particularly fragile constituency.

We will redouble this effort, ensuring that a culture of care means fair compensation, safe working conditions, freedom from power abuses and from gender-based violence, equitable access to and adequate support for their professional development, certain that only by sharing decision-making power can we build solid, resilient institutions and practices.

By sharing our knowledge and our networks, we open new pathways for meaningful change through action, advocacy, and self-organisation, and we empower our workers, artists and professionals with the agency to plan, build and retire from successful careers.

By valuing the well-being of cultural workers, and by recognising the demanding nature of several disciplines and practices, we ensure adequate support to artists, performers and professionals before, during and after they leave the stage, nurturing a sustainable and thriving cultural sector that enriches society.

### **VIII. Curating Care**

As curators, we are the custodians of our societies' past, present and future, in partnership with our communities. We take on the role of storyteller and bring meaning to our collective memory and artistic expressions. It is a far-reaching responsibility to shape how we perceive ourselves and our place in the world.

As such, we have a responsibility to curate care into our narratives. By bringing together diverse perspectives, by exploring new connections, and by amplifying underrepresented voices, curation becomes a means to foster inclusivity, appreciation, and dialogue, a tool to sow the seeds of care. By nurturing a culture of care, we cultivate a society where every individual feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive - each of us is an artwork in the making.

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For Culture Action Europe, curating care prioritises the values of empathy, connection and understanding by placing human dignity and agency at the centre of our stories. We must listen in order to receive, reflect, and respond.

The cultural sector must define its mission through its relevance to its community - and measure that relevance through a living dialogue within it.

We must open our doors and our hearts to the other, creating safe spaces for creative experimentation, building institutions and practices that are able and agile enough to recognise and resource wider forms of care at every scale of social life, understanding that as human beings we have limits and that our vulnerability can be a strength.

### **A Call to Action**

By putting care at the core of our practices, we can promote well-being, transform society, and create a more just and equitable world. Together, we can cultivate a politics and ethics of care through Culture, forging a path towards a sustainable, compassionate, and interconnected future.

This commitment should be translated into concrete policies and initiatives at all levels of Culture Action Europe's political engagement, albeit at a local, national or European level.

We invite cultural practitioners, organisations, policymakers, thinkers, researchers, activists, and artists to join us in rethinking the challenges of our time.

Let us reimagine the role of Culture in shaping our future.



## Beyond the Obvious Handover to Malmö

At the end of the un|conference the handover to the hosts of next year's *Beyond the Obvious* took place. With the gift of a packet of seeds, Michail Marmarinos (General Artistic Director of 2023 Eleusis) passed the torch to Malmö City's culture director Pernilla Conde Hellman. The next edition of *Beyond the Obvious* will take place in Malmö from 29 May 2024.



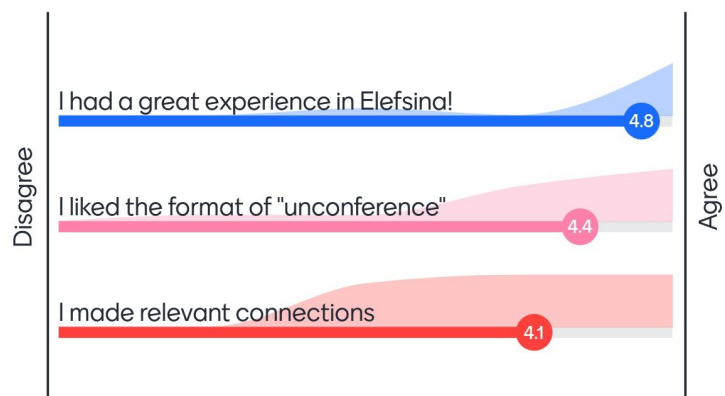
## Handle with Care in Numbers



## Handle with Care: Feedback



### BtO 2023: tell us what you think!



**What did you enjoy the most?**

- Discussion circles
- Informal conversations
- The un|conference participative format
- Speakers
- Speed-dating with members
- Elefsina 2023 events
- Eating locally

**What do you want us to change in Malmö?**

- Improve the project agora format/duration
- No fixed, formal seating
- Fewer/shorter panels
- More coworking time and more informal networking time
- Digital participation for those unable to come in person
- More daring, more challenging
- More open discussions with the policy-makers
- More days in host city to embrace “slow” concept
- Shorter conference

**Culture Action Europe  
Beyond the Obvious 2023**



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