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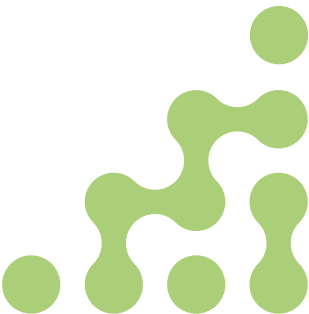
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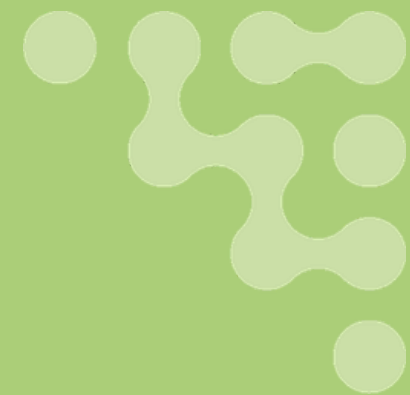
Methodological guidelines for creating integrated local strategies for CCSI-driven circular transition:

Harnessing the power of creatives to drive the circular economy in cities

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Introduction

These guidelines aim to provide a step-by-step framework for the systematic integration of creative and cultural sectors and industries (CCSI) into the planning and delivery of urban circular economy action. This document draws on the lessons learned in six cities - Aarhus, Gdynia, Kiel, Riga, Tallinn and Turku - which took part in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region project “Creative Circular Cities” (2023–2026).

The project developed and piloted ways to enable local creative and cultural actors to participate in and drive circular initiatives. Throughout the project, the six cities involved creatives in citizen engagement activities that highlighted more mindful and circular consumption options. At the same time, creatives were offered business mentoring, collaboration and networking opportunities to support the adoption of more circular approaches in their own operations.

The local pilot activities generated valuable insights into the importance of municipal planning documents for systematically integrating CCSI into circular economy activities. Long-term circularity plans often focus on ‘traditional’ sectors, such as manufacturing, food and waste, without assigning a dedicated role to creative and cultural actors. Without clearly defined responsibilities, municipal actors may find it difficult to engage these stakeholders when planned actions move into implementation. Creative and cultural stakeholders, in turn, may not see how they can contribute to making their city more circular.

This document synthesizes the knowledge gained into concrete steps that cities can take to involve their local creative and cultural communities systematically in circular action. The guidelines are complemented by examples from the CCC cities, illustrating practical approaches and the value that creative perspectives can bring to circularity.

More information on the activities and results of the project can be found here: creativecommons.org/circularcities.com

The value of creative and cultural actors in the urban circular economy

Before presenting tangible steps to better integrate cultural and creative actors into urban circular strategies, it is important to highlight the value this sector can bring to a city transitioning from a linear to circular economy. As this change is not only a technological or infrastructural challenge, it also requires new thinking in how products and services are designed, how resources are used, how people consume, and how communities participate in urban change. Cultural and creative actors can make an important contribution to these dimensions by connecting innovation, design, behaviour, culture and citizen engagement.

Creative and cultural sectors can contribute to circularity at several points along the value chain. Designers, architects, artists, makers, and creative businesses can help develop products and services that support reuse, repair, longevity, resource efficiency and new forms of access and consumption. The Creative Circular Cities project demonstrates how creative actors can contribute directly to circular business development and citizen-oriented solutions, while also strengthening collaboration between municipalities, businesses, communities and the creative sector. Their contribution is equally important on the demand side of the circular economy.

Circular systems depend on people adopting new practices, such as repairing, sharing, reusing and reducing consumption. Cultural and creative organisations can make these practices more visible, desirable and accessible through storytelling, design, public art, events, exhibitions, participatory activities and other forms of cultural engagement. The GreenDEMO[1] project highlights that “creative approaches can help shape the questions being asked, build trust, strengthen community ownership and support more inclusive decision-making”.

Creative actors can also strengthen place-based and participatory governance. Because many cultural organisations and creative practitioners are embedded in local communities, they can act as intermediaries between municipalities and residents, helping to identify local needs, test new approaches and involve groups that may not engage through conventional policy processes.



This is particularly relevant for circular economy measures, which need to respond to the specific characteristics of neighbourhoods, communities and local economies.

However, the potential of cultural and creative practitioners to contribute to the circular economy remains underused. Recent research (Davis & Charter, 2025) suggests that creative industries are still only marginally integrated into many circular economy strategies, with existing activity often concentrated on downstream measures such as recycling and reuse rather than more transformative approaches such as redesign and new models of production and consumption[2].

For cities, the experience of the Creative Circular Cities project provides practical evidence that cultural and creative sectors and industries can play a vital role in advancing urban circular action. Rather than being engaged primarily to communicate circular economy policies after decisions have been made, cultural and creative actors can contribute as co-designers, innovators, intermediaries and community partners, helping to develop and test circular solutions in collaboration with municipalities, businesses and citizens.

The CCC project demonstrates the value of this approach by bringing CCSIs directly into the development of circular business models, consumption practices and local solutions. Their involvement can help cities develop circular strategies that are not only technically viable, but also economically attractive, socially inclusive and culturally relevant. The value of the creative and cultural sector therefore lies in its ability to connect the technical and social dimensions of circularity helping cities to redesign systems while also making new ways of producing, consuming and living more understandable, desirable and locally meaningful.



The Creative Circular Cities experience

As part of the CCC project, six cities explored how the creative and cultural industries can be better integrated into urban circular economy strategies and decision-making. One key insight that emerged throughout the project was that there is no 'one size fits all' strategic approach. Different starting points, varying municipal and national legislation, commitments and goals make it difficult for all cities to adopt the same approach to involving CCSI into circular action.

Nevertheless, the CCC experience also identified a number of common steps that cities can take, regardless of their specific local and institutional contexts. The following chapters set out these key steps for strengthening the integration of cultural and creative actors into urban circular economy strategies.

The different strategies can be found on the [creativecommons.org/circularcities.com](https://creativecommons.org/circularcities) website under each city's page.

Step 1: Baseline assessment and mapping

When planning the development or update of a municipal strategy, such as a circular economy action plan or a wider sustainability roadmap, reviewing existing sectoral strategies and plans can be a useful first step towards building an accurate picture of the current situation.

CCSI might already be assigned roles and responsibilities in previous climate action plans, sustainability roadmaps or circular economy strategies. At the same time, circular action, resource efficiency and sustainability goals might feature in sectoral creative industry strategies or cultural sector development plans.

While the intersection of creative and cultural actors and circularity may be scattered across urban planning documents, there is value in reviewing and gathering information on the activities that are already being implemented. This baseline assessment can support alignment across sectors and avoid uncoordinated urban policies.



In addition, mapping active creative and cultural actors can complement the baseline analysis. This involves reviewing existing collaboration partners while also identifying new stakeholders who can bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Throughout the CCC project, cities worked with established long-term partners, such as theatres, as well as individual artists, students and emerging creatives. Pilot activities and word-of-mouth referrals through existing contacts often helped bring new participants into the process.

CCC example: **Kiel, Germany**

In the “Integrated Strategy for a CCSI-Driven Circular Transition in Kiel” a concise section (p.2&3) on Kiel’s starting point summarizes the city’s circularity plans and ambitions and identifies several cultural and creative actors in the city as already established collaboration partners. Among the identified stakeholders are theatres, event spaces, a fine arts university and a design and art association. The development of this evidence base allows to conclude that “Kiel enters this [circular] transition from a position of relative strength” and makes it easier to build on existing relationships.

CCC example: **Riga, Latvia**

The Riga Municipality Circular Economy Strategy 2040 clearly recognizes connections to other municipal planning documents, initiatives and strategies. With regards to the role of creative and cultural actors in the circular economy, the strategy acknowledges the national design strategy 2022-2027 and Latvian Nature Fund’s guidelines for environment-friendly event organisation, as important baselines for creative-led circular action.



In conclusion, a baseline assessment and stakeholder mapping help a city understand how creative and cultural actors have been involved in, or excluded from, circular action to date. This can identify existing strengths as well as gaps that a new or updated municipal planning document or strategy could address.

Step 2: Dialogue and collaboration with CCSI and beyond

Building on the baseline assessment and stakeholder mapping, it is essential to seek dialogue and collaboration with creative and cultural actors when developing integrated circular transition strategies. Early and meaningful involvement in setting goals, defining actions, and planning monitoring and evaluation can strengthen stakeholders' ownership and support delivery during implementation.

A municipality can start with the existing contacts identified in the previous step and expand its network of creative and cultural actors through established collaborations. Thematic discussions on circular economy topics, such as textile waste, product packaging, resource-efficiency innovation and food waste, can benefit from the insights of the creative and cultural sectors and industries. Drawing on their practical experience and innovative ideas, these stakeholders can help the municipality define more ambitious, targeted or effective circular activities.

CCC example: Gdynia, Poland

At the start of the CCC project, Gdynia decided to focus on the issue of urban bulky waste. Local project partners involved creative and cultural actors especially in showcasing to residents how unwanted furniture can be turned from trash to treasure. On one hand, creatives can provide new ways of thinking and design perspectives, while at the same time they are residents themselves, thus having a comprehensive view on the issue of bulky waste in Gdynia.



Gdynia's pilot activities on bulky waste were greatly influenced by the feedback and ideas of local creatives that took part in project partner organised workshops and discussions. During these engagements, creatives were presented with draft concepts on the project partners pilot initiatives and comments gathered during the meetings was incorporated into the design of both the business support pilot and the citizen engagement pilot.

Not only did this cooperation allow to improve initial project pilot activities, but these regular engagements strengthened also strengthened the possibility of continued collaboration and trust with the creative and cultural sectors for future projects, strategies and activities around circular economy.

Beyond collaboration with local creatives, the CCC project found that successful involvement in circular action also requires other stakeholders. Close cooperation across municipal departments is vital for aligning priorities and creating cross-sectoral synergies. In particular, collaboration between environmental departments or municipal agencies and cultural departments is essential when involving creative actors in circular action.

Taking opportunities for cross-departmental exchange and attending one another's stakeholder-engagement events can help build closer working relationships.

CCC example: **Turku, Finland**

One of the CCC activities was the organisation of so-called "Co-creation arenas". These can be regarded regular discussion, exchange and action platforms that bring together different stakeholders necessary to implement creative-led circular actions. In Turku, these co-creation arenas were held on a regular basis and invited amongst local creatives, NGOs and business sector representatives, different municipal departments to engage in continuous dialogue.



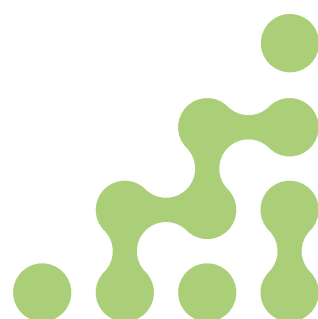
At the initial stage of the project, the co-creation arena functioned primarily as a platform for co-developing and supporting the CCC pilot actions, including the Circular Economy Carnival (ReTurku) and the creative idea incubator. With the aid of these meetings, stakeholders contributed to shaping the content, partnerships, and implementation models of the pilots. These 'morning coffees' enabled practical coordination, exchange of ideas, and alignment between different actors, ensuring that the pilots were grounded in local needs and benefitted from diverse perspectives.

During 2026, the focus of the co-creation arena gradually shifted towards strengthening internal collaboration within the municipal organization and ensuring the continuity of the format beyond the project lifetime. The participants consider regular encounters between municipal sectors essential for enabling cooperation and advancing circular economy and sustainability goals. There is a clear shared ambition among participants of the co-creation arena to continue after the project ends. The format has allowed participants to share ongoing initiatives, identify synergies, and learn from each other's work.

Step 3: Identifying CCSI-led circular action

If consultations with creative and cultural actors are meaningful, they can lead to concrete roles and responsibilities in a circular economy strategy. The CCC project showed that creatives can play a significant role in citizen engagement and more sustainable consumption patterns. The creative and cultural sector can also be seen as a business sector in its own right, with opportunities to adopt more circular and resource-efficient practices.

Each CCC city developed its own integrated strategy for a creative-led circular transition. The examples below offer inspiration for the types of activities that creative and cultural actors could be assigned within a circular economy strategy.



CCC example: **Kiel, Germany**

Culture as an Engagement Tool

Cultural formats provide an effective way to reach broader audiences and encourage active participation in the circular economy. Approaches such as exhibitions on reuse and circular design, repair and upcycling events, storytelling, public dialogue, and workshops integrated into cultural activities can make circularity more accessible and engaging. CCC pilot activities demonstrate how creative and participatory formats can successfully engage citizens, raise awareness, and inspire more sustainable practices.

CCC example: **Riga, Latvia**

Circular economy principles in cultural heritage preservation

Riga recognizes the intersection between culture, conservation and construction, identifying an opportunity to mainstream the role of cultural and creative actors, such as architects and designers, in existing urban circular economy fields. Riga City Municipality implements various Smart City initiatives to revitalise the municipality's cultural and historical environment and promote the responsible use of resources in the construction sector, thereby conserving primary resources.

CCC example: **Tallinn, Estonia**

Creatives as providers of circular products and services

Creative and cultural actors can play an important role in advancing the circular economy by developing circular products, services, events, and business models that promote reuse, repair, sharing, and reduced consumption. Tallinn supports this transition through initiatives that foster circular entrepreneurship and innovation, including incubators, training, testing opportunities, and applied research. Cultural institutions, libraries, and other public venues can also serve as visible spaces for demonstrating circular practices and creating opportunities for reuse and repair.



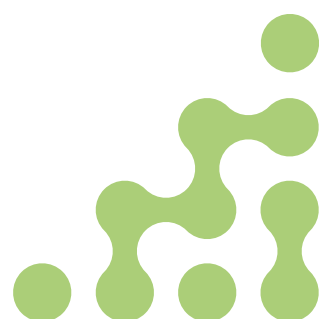
Checklist for the creation of an integrated creative-led circular economy strategy

This checklist is intended for municipal actors who want to better integrate creative and cultural actors into the planning and delivery of circular economy action. Although planning cycles and approaches vary across countries, the questions below can help municipalities address each phase of strategy development systematically.

Preparatory phase:

Each city follows its own planning cycle, and different documents are updated at different times. Whether you are updating an existing strategy or developing a new planning document, the following questions can help you prepare:

- Do existing plans, documents or initiatives already assign roles to creative and cultural actors in sustainability or circular economy implementation?
- What contacts and collaborative relationships do I already have with creative and cultural actors in my city?
- Do my existing contacts represent different fields within CCSI, or should I reach out to a broader range of creative and cultural actors?
- Have I identified any barriers that could prevent creative and cultural actors from participating, such as limited time, accessibility needs or lack of resources?



Stakeholder engagement phase:

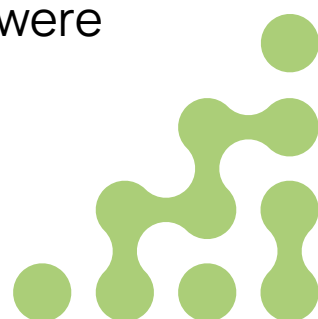
Throughout the development of a strategy or plan, there are different opportunities to involve stakeholders and gather feedback and ideas. This can take the form of stakeholder-engagement workshops or written comments on a draft planning document. At this stage, ask yourself:

- Have I invited creative and cultural actors to participate in discussions about the strategy?
- Have I made the purpose, scope and timeline of the consultation clear, and provided accessible ways for different stakeholders to contribute?
- Have I actively sought input from creative and cultural actors on different aspects of the strategy, rather than limiting discussions to waste upcycling and citizen engagement?

Drafting phase:

The drafting phase is where consultation findings and agreed priorities are translated into clear objectives, actions and responsibilities in the strategy. As you prepare the draft, ask yourself:

- Are the proposed actions specific about who is responsible, what will be delivered and when?
- Have I received written feedback from creative and cultural actors?
- Have I shown creative and cultural actors how their feedback has, or has not, been incorporated, and explained the reasons where suggestions were not taken forward?

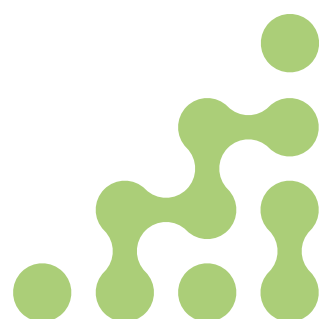


- Have I defined clear indicators, a baseline and a process for reviewing progress with creative and cultural stakeholders?
- Is input from creative and cultural actors concentrated in only one part of the strategy, or is it considered in a balanced and comprehensive way throughout the document?

Implementation phase:

The implementation phase turns the strategy's commitments into coordinated action. Before and during delivery, consider whether the necessary responsibilities, resources and monitoring arrangements are in place:

- Does the strategy recognize creative and cultural actors as delivery partners for circular economy action?
- Have I allocated, or identified potential sources of, funding for creative and cultural actors to deliver circular economy actions?
- How will I monitor and evaluate the contribution of creative and cultural actors to the overall circular economy goals?



Other valuable resources

Each CCC city has developed an integrated strategy for a creative-led circular transition. These strategies are available at creativecircularcities.com/cities and offer useful inspiration. Each reflects a different starting point and approach to strategic planning.

The [CCC policy roadmap](#) is also a valuable resource for understanding the wider political landscape and framework for creative-led circular transitions. It examines strategic planning in depth, alongside topics such as budgeting and resource planning, which are relevant to developing a creative-led circular economy strategy.

