



Photo: Joas Stecker

Integrated Strategy for a CCSI-Driven Circular Transition in Kiel

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Interreg
Baltic Sea Region



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CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Creative Circular Cities

Preface



This strategy was developed within the framework of the Creative Circular Cities (CCC) project, an Interreg Baltic Sea Region initiative that explored how culture and creativity can contribute to accelerating circular transition processes in cities. The project was implemented in six Baltic Sea Region cities – Aarhus, Gdynia, Kiel, Riga, Tallinn and Turku and brought together 14 partners and 23 associate partners under the lead of the Danish Cultural Institute.

In each city, municipalities, cultural organisations, NGOs, and industry partners collaborated to implement pilot activities that integrated circular economy principles into the Cultural and Creative Sector and Industries (CCSI) and used CCSI as a channel to engage citizens. Through these pilots, practical approaches were tested and strategies were developed based on the results.

This document presents Kiel's strategy, building on the experiences and lessons learned through the CCC project. While grounded in the local context, it reflects a broader transnational learning process and highlights approaches that may be relevant for other cities seeking to mobilise their cultural and creative sectors in support of circular economy objectives and sustainable urban development.

1. Introduction

The challenge

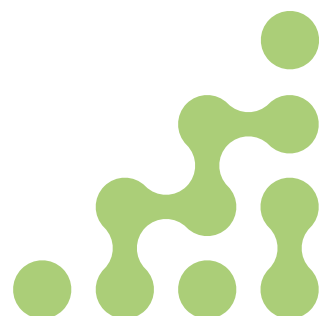
Cities face growing pressure to reduce resource consumption, cut waste, and transition towards more sustainable models of production and consumption. Circular economy – which seeks to maintain the value of products, materials, and resources for as long as possible, replacing the linear take-make-dispose model with prevention, reuse, repair, remanufacturing and recycling – is increasingly recognised as a practical response to these challenges. For cities, it offers pathways to reduce environmental impacts while strengthening local resilience, fostering innovation, and supporting economic development.

Yet circular economy is not primarily a technical matter. The infrastructure, systems, and policies required for circularity are well understood. What is harder – and often underestimated – is the shift in behaviour, values, and everyday practice that makes those systems work. This is where culture and creativity become strategically important.

The role of culture and creativity

The Cultural and Creative Sector and Industries (CCSI) – encompassing artistic expression, cultural heritage, design, media, communication, and creative production – have a distinctive capacity to make complex ideas visible, tangible and meaningful. Where technical communication informs, cultural engagement involves. Where policy sets direction, creative practice demonstrates possibility.

In the context of circular economy, this means translating abstract sustainability objectives into concrete experiences: a repair festival, a circular design challenge, a storytelling event, a city guide to second-hand and sharing initiatives. These are not peripheral activities. They are the means by which circularity becomes part of how a city thinks about itself.



Kiel's starting point

Kiel enters this transition from a position of relative strength. The city has established sustainability frameworks in place - the Zero Waste Strategy, the Masterplan 100% Climate Protection, and ongoing commitments to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) reporting and the Agenda 2030 - alongside a dynamic cultural and creative ecosystem and strong connections to the Baltic Sea Region.

The CCC project provided the opportunity to test how these assets could be mobilised together. A local Steering Group, bringing together a.o Zero Waste Kiel e.V., Heinrich-Böll-Foundation Schleswig-Holstein, Anschar GmbH and the Environment Protection Department of the City of Kiel (associate partner) coordinated pilot activities across reuse, repair, upcycling, circular design, entrepreneurship and citizen participation. The lessons from that process form the foundation of this strategy.

Purpose of this Strategy

This strategy outlines how Kiel can build on that base— not by creating new structures, but by connecting and strengthening what already exists. Its objectives are to:

- highlight circular practices within the Cultural and Creative Sector and Industries (CCSI)
- prove how culture and creativity can engage citizens and raise awareness of circular economy principles
- strengthen cooperation between public institutions, civil society, education, businesses and creative actors
- make existing circular initiatives more visible and accessible
- support the implementation of Kiel's broader sustainability, climate and innovation objectives

Rather than creating new structures, the strategy is grounded in its first principle: strengthening existing networks, programmes, partnerships, and initiatives while fostering greater cross-sector collaboration.



2. Local Context and Stakeholders

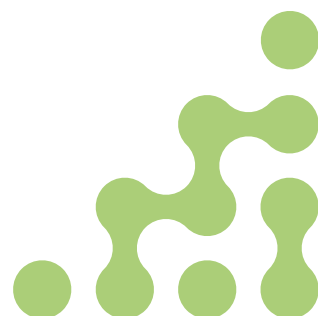
Kiel benefits from a diverse ecosystem of public institutions, cultural organisations, educational institutions, businesses and civil society actors that can contribute to a circular transition. The CCC co-creation process aimed to identify and potentially bring together stakeholders from different sectors, including:

Kiel Municipality Departments stakeholders

- Environmental protection department
- Urban planning department
- Creative City department
- Förde VHS - Adult education centre for culture and further education
- Economic Development and Innovation
- International Affairs and Sustainability, Office of the City President
- Kiel Business Development (Kieler Wirtschaftsförderung - KIWI)
- Kieler Woche Department yearly water sports event and a public festival

Cultural and creative sector stakeholders

- MERKUR Ostseehalle - venue for sports events, large concerts, shows and trade fairs
- Theater Kiel
- Open Campus SH - Educational and innovation Hub for a.o start-up founders and creatives
- KITZ - Kiel Innovation and Technology Centre
- Muthesius Kunsthochschule - University of Fine Arts and Design
- Kreativer Stammtisch - network for creative professionals in Kiel
- Kunstverein Haus 8 - Art and Design Association
- Anschar Campus - Centre for art, culture and innovative ideas



Economy, Sustainability and Circular Economy Experts

- Ministry for Energy Transition, Climate Protection, Environment and Nature (MEKUN)
- Zero Waste Kiel e.V. - Environmental organisation
- Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Schleswig-Holstein - a state-level branch of the HBöll Foundation. It is associated with the Alliance 90/The Greens and operates as an independent educational organization
- Christian Albrecht Universität - Kiel
- KielRegion - regional development agency/ Grønbusiness - Support for businesses engaging in the circular economy.
- IHK - Chamber of Industry and Commerce
- Circular economy experts and practitioners involved in the CCC projects

Pilot activities (section 5) implemented during the CCC project demonstrated the potential of cooperation across these stakeholder groups and provided a basis for future action.

3. Vision and Strategic Objectives

This strategy positions culture and creativity as a driver of the circular transition in Kiel. In line with the CCC Interreg project in the Baltic Region, the strategy pursues two main objectives:

Objective 1

Advance circular economy practices within the Cultural and Creative Sector and Industries (CCSI).

Objective 2

Leverage culture and creativity to engage citizens with circular economy principles by making circularity visible, tangible and desirable in everyday life.

Through these objectives, the strategy seeks to strengthen environmental sustainability, innovation, community engagement, and local resilience.



4. A Culture-Led Circular Transition for Kiel

Kiel's engagement in a culture-led circular transition represents both a strategic opportunity and a practical pathway to strengthen existing sustainability efforts.

The advantages for Kiel are:

Alignment with European priorities

The circular economy is a central element of European sustainability policy. By integrating culture and creativity into circular transition pathways, Kiel contributes to broader objectives related to:

- environmental sustainability
- economic resilience and innovation
- social cohesion and participation

Strengthening Kiel's position in the Baltic Sea Region

By fostering innovation, supporting local economic resilience, creating new business and employment opportunities and enhancing the city's attractiveness for talent, investment, and cross-regional collaboration, Kiel can serve as a practical reference point for circular solutions in the region.

Building on and reinforcing existing city strategies

The approach complements and reinforces existing frameworks:

- in climate protection (e.g. Masterplan 100% Klimaschutz, University Climate Concept 2030)
- in Zero Waste (e.g. Zero Waste Strategy of Kiel)
- in sustainability (e.g. Voluntary Local Review on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Kiel 2042 Future Dialogue, Agenda 2030)

By integrating cultural and creative dimensions, it strengthens cross-sectoral coherence and improves the implementation capacity of these strategies.



Strengthening citizen engagement

Culture and creativity provide accessible entry points to understand and experience circular economy principles. By translating complex sustainability challenges into tangible, everyday experiences, they make circularity more visible and relevant. This helps strengthen community participation, local identity, and a shared sense of responsibility for sustainable development in Kiel.

5. Lessons Learned from the CCC Pilot Phase

In each partner city, the CCC project explored opportunities through pilot initiatives. Within the available time and capacities, these pilots served as exploratory prototypes, helping to test ideas and generate insights for further development.

Pilot CCC Activities in Kiel (non-exhaustive list)

Objective: Create structures that connect CCSI actors, businesses, public authorities, and civil society around a shared circular transition agenda.

Establishment of a Steering Group

A Steering Group was established, bringing together Kiel project partners, the municipality (as an associate partner), and stakeholders from circular economy. The Steering Group convened four times during the project. These meetings served as a platform to review project progress, ensure alignment with strategic objectives, provide guidance and recommendations, and support the design and implementation of the pilot activities.

Circular Stage at the Waterkant Festival

The Waterkant Festival is a two-day innovation and start-up festival that brings together entrepreneurs, creative professionals, researchers, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and investors from across Northern Europe. The event showcases innovations, prototypes, emerging trends and future-oriented ideas.



The CCC project used the festival as a platform in 2024, 2025, and 2026, organising one exhibition and three panel discussions on topics including Circular Innovations, “Don't Trash It – Reuse It” and Circular Economy as an Economic Model for the Future. This provided an opportunity to engage a diverse audience of creatives, businesses, policymakers, students and citizens. The festival attracts more than 1,500 visitors each year.

Dissemination and Outreach Activities

Project results and experiences were disseminated through a range of events and platforms, including:

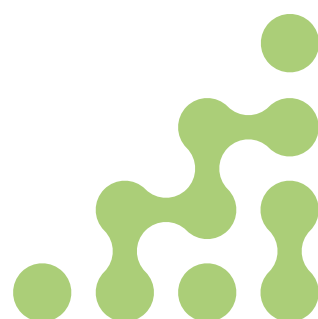
- KielKannMehr Zukunft Festival (Kiel)
- Agora of Democracy (Kiel)
- Urban Future Festival (Ljubljana)
- Green Culture Festival (Frankfurt)
- CCC Final Conference (Kiel)
- CCC Partner Meetings
- Comic Publication
- and much more

Supporting Circular Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Objective: Enable businesses, start-ups and creative actors to develop and test circular business models.

Circular Catalyst Programme

An introductory Circular Catalyst programme for Students and start-ups was developed. Eight circular economy sessions were organised, featuring experts covering various aspects of circular economy implementation. The programme was delivered within the educational framework of Open Campus Schleswig-Holstein.



Circular Design Workshop

A workshop with a circular economy expert explored how circular design can drive innovation and strengthen sustainable business models.

Start-up Prototyping Week Session

A dedicated session on integrating circular economy principles into early-stage start-ups was organised as part of the Prototyping Week programme led by Open Campus Schleswig-Holstein.

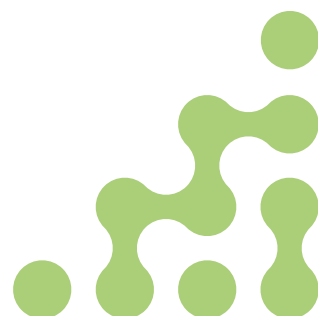
Circularity Cup

A Circularity Cup was introduced within the framework of the GründerCup competition (a regional start-up pitching competition), supported financially by the City of Kiel. Circular economy criteria were created and integrated into the award assessment process. The Circularity Cup will be awarded in the course of 2026 and recognises circular business models in Kiel and the local area.

Goldmine Project

The Goldmine Project, organised in collaboration with Muthesius University of Fine Arts and Design, engaged more than 30 students in designing new products from materials sourced from a local scrap yard within a short timeframe. The initiative demonstrated the practical application of circular economy principles through creative experimentation.

These formats provide concrete examples of how circular principles can be integrated into business development processes and could be further expanded or embedded within existing support structures.



Engaging Citizens and Strengthening Circular Culture

Objective: Increase public awareness of and participation in circular lifestyles and practices.

Citizens' Engagement Lab

The Citizens' Engagement Lab aimed to learn from experts about effective citizen engagement methods, gain inspiration from good practices, and explore approaches for promoting circular economy concepts and citizen participation during the pilot phase. It serves as a practical reference point for the citizen engagement formats described in Section 7.

Repair and Upcycling Festivals

Two Repair and Upcycling Festivals were organised at Anscharcampus. They featured each time more than 30 activities, workshops, and talks focused on repair, reuse, and upcycling, complemented by music and food in a festive atmosphere. The events reached approximately 1,000 participants in total.

Circular Stories Night

In collaboration with the monthly storytelling format "Storytelling.Kiel", a Circular Stories Night was organised. The event brought together people whose work, hobbies or voluntary activities contribute to resource conservation. Participants shared personal experiences and perspectives, fostering creativity, dialogue, and public engagement around circular economy themes.

Development of the Circular City Guide

A Circular City Guide was developed to compile and showcase circular economy activities and initiatives across Kiel. The guide includes information on creative workshops, repair cafés, sharing initiatives and other circular economy-related opportunities available throughout the city.

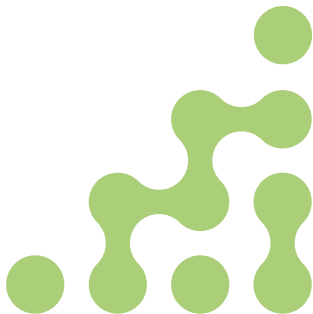


The main pilot activities realised in CCC partner cities are summarised below:

Aarhus	Uses culture and creativity to activate urban spaces and foster collaboration between citizens, creatives and businesses, demonstrating how creative sectors can drive local circular transformation.
Gdynia	Develops innovative reuse solutions for bulky household waste, turning discarded materials into resources through creative and circular value chains.
Riga	Creates a circular garden and systems aimed at reducing single-use materials at public events.
Tallinn	Supports SMEs in measuring and improving their circularity performance while engaging creative industries in developing practical circular business solutions.
Turku	Pilots a circular business incubator and the ReTurku Circular Economy Carnival, using creative industries and citizen participation to test new circular business models and lifestyle solutions.

6. Strategy in 5 points

The CCC project demonstrated that cities can play a role in enabling and accelerating the circular transition. The experience gained in Kiel suggests five strategic principles that can guide future action. These principles are not intended as a rigid roadmap, but rather as complementary approaches that can help municipalities build a resilient and locally rooted circular ecosystem. Together, they serve the two main objectives set out in Section 3: advancing circular practices within CCSI, and leveraging culture and creativity to engage citizens with circularity.



1. Build on What Already Exists

One of the strongest lessons from the CCC project is that cities do not need to start from scratch. Kiel already benefits from a rich landscape of initiatives, organisations, festivals, creative spaces and community groups working on sustainability, repair, sharing, entrepreneurship and social innovation. Rather than creating parallel structures, the city can strengthen, connect and give visibility to these existing actors.

The experience of the Circular City Guide, the Waterkant Festival and collaborations with Anscharcampus showed that leveraging existing networks allows resources to be used more efficiently while increasing the reach and impact of circular initiatives. The city's role is therefore to identify, support and connect these local assets into a coherent ecosystem.

This approach is consistent with established municipal practice in Kiel, including participatory and cross-sectoral stakeholder processes where relevant actors are brought together in workshops to co-develop strategies (for example within the Zero Waste City process, where stakeholders from administration, business, civil society and academia were involved in defining priorities and action areas).

2. Promote a Common Understanding of Circularity

A relevant lesson from the CCC project is that circularity is not self-explanatory and requires active clarification in multi-stakeholder settings. In Kiel, different actors often approached circularity from distinct perspectives: for some it primarily referred to waste prevention and recycling, while others emphasised design innovation, business model transformation, or cultural change. Without alignment, this diversity risks fragmentation.

This challenge has also been visible in municipal and cross-sector processes where shared understanding needed to be developed collectively. In the Zero Waste City process, for example, stakeholders worked together to translate broad circular objectives into locally relevant priorities and measures.



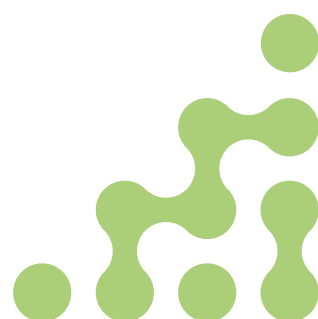
Similarly, in CCC-related formats, concepts such as circular economy, reuse, upcycling or circular design were interpreted differently depending on professional background. Co-creation arenas and Steering Group discussions therefore functioned as spaces to gradually align language, expectations and objectives.

This experience suggests that developing a common understanding is an ongoing governance task. The city can play a facilitating role in supporting this alignment so that circularity evolves into a shared reference framework rather than remaining a set of parallel interpretations.

3. Be an Enabler and Facilitator

The CCC experience suggests a broader municipal tendency in Kiel: the city's added value assumed to lie primarily in enabling collaboration rather than directly implementing solutions. This is expressed through a range of facilitation practices, including:

- stakeholder mapping and activation processes bringing together actors from administration, business, civil society and academia
- co-design workshops for strategy development defining priorities and action fields collaboratively
- cross-departmental and cross-sector working groups aligning municipal units and external partners
- moderation of multi-actor roundtables to reconcile interests and develop shared frameworks
- provision of neutral collaboration spaces for non-hierarchical exchange
- launch and coordination of pilot actions with external partners to enable experimentation
- support for citizen engagement formats such as workshops and public dialogues
- integration of external expertise from academia, culture and business into municipal processes



These practices indicate an established facilitation role within municipal work in Kiel. The CCC project reinforces this approach by showing its relevance for circular transition: the municipality provides framing conditions, connects actors and enables experimentation, while concrete implementation emerges through collaborative ecosystem dynamics.

4. Lead and Build the Movement

While circular initiatives often emerge from the grassroots level, the CCC experience highlighted the importance of visible public leadership. By integrating circularity into strategic priorities, supporting flagship events and communicating a clear vision, the city can help create momentum and legitimacy for the transition. Activities such as the Circular Stage at the Waterkant Festival and participation in international networks showed how public authorities can act as conveners and ambassadors. Beyond individual projects, the city can build a narrative that inspires participation and demonstrates that circularity contributes to economic resilience, innovation and quality of life. At the same time, the CCC project demonstrated that lasting impact depends on collaboration with external stakeholders, as cultural organisations, businesses, educational institutions, and civil society initiatives are essential partners in developing and scaling circular practices.

This leadership role builds on existing municipal practice in Kiel, for example through:

- integration of Zero Waste criteria into municipal procurement processes (Zero Waste City strategy)
- sustainability-oriented development of major public events such as Kieler Woche, with increasing attention to resource use and organisation
- ongoing efforts to align large-scale public activities with sustainability and circularity objectives

These examples can be understood as building blocks for further development within a more explicit CCSI-oriented circular economy strategy.



5. Develop and Maintain Partnerships

The CCC project demonstrated that circular transition depends on strong and long-lasting partnerships. Locally, collaboration between the municipality, businesses, cultural and creative actors, universities, community organisations and citizens proved essential for generating ideas, mobilising resources and reaching diverse audiences across sectors.

At the same time, cooperation with partner cities across the Baltic Sea Region added an important transnational dimension. Through study visits, thematic labs and peer-learning activities, Kiel gained access to new approaches, tested methods and practical examples, while also contributing its own experiences to a shared European learning process.

The city can build on this foundation by maintaining and further developing both local and international networks beyond individual projects. Partnerships can be understood as a strategic resource that supports innovation capacity, strengthens knowledge exchange, facilitates access to funding opportunities and enables the city to advance its circular transition in cooperation with a wider ecosystem of partners.

7. Implementation Framework, Governance and Enabling Conditions

The implementation of a culture-led circular transition in Kiel does not require new standalone structures. It depends instead on establishing enabling conditions - coordination mechanisms, integration into existing instruments, and stable interfaces across sectors - that allow circular initiatives to be sustained, connected, and scaled over time.

Coordination Across Departments and Sectors

Circular economy cuts across multiple municipal fields: culture, environment, urban development, education and economic development. Effective implementation therefore requires a shared coordination point that connects these domains without adding administrative complexity.



A light coordination arrangement - building on the model established by the CCC Steering Group during the pilot phase - could fulfil this function. Its role would be operational rather than decision-making: maintaining an overview of ongoing initiatives, ensuring alignment between municipal departments and external partners and providing continuity across projects. This is not a new body, but a formalised continuation of a working practice that has already proven effective.

Integration into Existing Municipal Instruments

Circularity is most durably embedded when it is integrated into tools the city already uses. Relevant entry points include:

- procurement and commissioning criteria
- funding and support schemes for culture, innovation, and sustainability
- event and festival organisation frameworks, including Kieler Woche
- strategic programmes in climate protection, Zero Waste and urban development

This approach avoids creating parallel structures and ensures that circular principles become part of standard municipal practice rather than remaining attached to specific initiatives.

Managing Interfaces Between Sectors

A recurring challenge identified through the CCC project is that the sectors most relevant to a culture-led circular transition – cultural production, civil society, innovation and economic development – do not naturally operate within shared frameworks. Bridging these interfaces requires consistent, low-threshold mechanisms for exchange: joint working formats, shared planning processes and designated points of contact across institutions.

The priority is not new programmes but reliable connections. The facilitation practices developed through the CCC project – co-creation workshops, multi-actor roundtables, cross-sector pilot coordination – provide a practical template for maintaining these interfaces on an ongoing basis.



Transnational Learning as an Ongoing Resource

The relationships and knowledge built through the CCC project represent a continuing asset. Exchange with partner cities in the Baltic Sea Region should be understood not as a project output but as an ongoing implementation resource: a source of comparable approaches, tested methods, and external reference points that can inform and challenge local development.

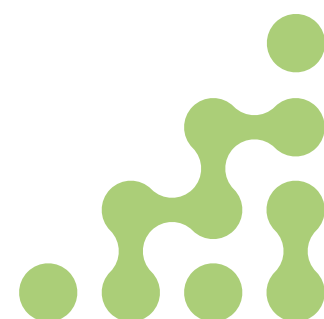
Maintaining these connections beyond the project lifecycle — through participation in networks, joint activities and peer exchange — strengthens Kiel's capacity to adapt and innovate as the circular transition evolves.

Continuity and Knowledge Transfer

One of the risks identified through the pilot phase is that knowledge and working relationships remain tied to specific projects and do not transfer into longer-term institutional practice. Addressing this requires deliberate effort:

- documenting and sharing lessons from pilot activities within municipal structures
- embedding tested formats and tools into ongoing programmes rather than treating them as one-off experiments
- ensuring that staff and partner organisations retain institutional memory across project cycles
- linking new initiatives explicitly to what has already been tested and learned

Implementation is an iterative process. The goal is not to execute a fixed plan but to build a local circular ecosystem that learns, adapts, and strengthens over time.



8. Communication and Public Engagement

Communication is also a driver of a culture-led circular transition, as it turns circular economy from a technical concept into something visible, understandable, and relevant in everyday life. Culture and creativity play a central role in this translation process.

Making Circularity Tangible

Circular economy needs to be communicated through concrete examples and local practices. Key priorities include:

- showcasing local circular initiatives and projects
- highlighting practical benefits (environmental, economic, social)
- linking circularity to everyday routines and decisions

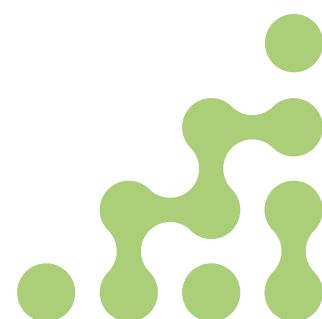
The Circular City Guide, developed during the CCC pilot phase, serves as a practical communication tool in this respect: it compiles and showcases existing circular initiatives across Kiel, making circularity accessible and visible to a broad public.

Culture as an Engagement Tool

Cultural formats help reach broader audiences and enable participation. Relevant approaches include:

- exhibitions on reuse and circular design
- repair and upcycling events
- storytelling and public dialogue formats
- workshops embedded in cultural events

CCC pilot activities such as Repair and Upcycling Festivals and the Goldmine Project demonstrate how creative formats can effectively engage citizens.



Towards a Shared Identity

Consistent communication helps embed circularity into Kiel's identity by linking it to creativity, innovation, and participation. Over time, this supports a shared understanding of circular economy as part of everyday urban life.

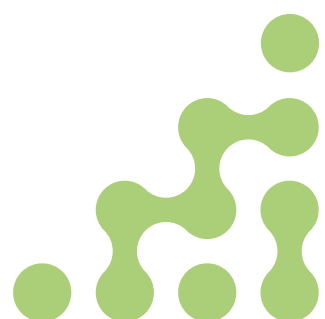
9. Conclusion

This strategy outlines how Kiel can advance a culture-led circular transition by strengthening the role of the Cultural and Creative Sector and Industries (CCSI) within existing sustainability, climate and innovation frameworks. It is based on experiences from the Creative Circular Cities (CCC) project and highlights how culture and creativity can support the implementation of circular economy principles in practice.

Rather than proposing new standalone structures, the strategy focuses on connecting and reinforcing existing initiatives, networks and programmes across sectors. It emphasises collaboration between cultural actors, civil society, businesses, education and public institutions, and highlights the value of experimentation through pilot activities, events and cross-sector cooperation.

A central insight from the CCC project is the importance of transnational cooperation. Exchange with partner cities in the Baltic Sea Region has demonstrated that culture-led circular approaches can be adapted to different urban contexts and enriched through shared learning and testing of practical solutions.

Looking ahead, the five strategic principles outlined in this document – building on existing assets, promoting a common understanding, enabling and facilitating collaboration, leading the movement, and developing lasting partnerships – provide a practical foundation for sustained action.



The next steps will involve embedding these principles into Kiel's existing governance and funding structures, maintaining and deepening partnerships established through the CCC project, and continuing to learn from both local experimentation and transnational exchange.

Ultimately, the success of a culture-led circular transition in Kiel depends on the ability to sustain collaboration across sectors, integrate lessons from experimentation into long-term frameworks, and maintain openness to learning and adaptation. By building on existing strengths within the CCSI ecosystem and strengthening cooperation across disciplines and institutions, Kiel can further develop its role in the emerging field of culture-driven circular transition in the Baltic Sea Region.



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