ALL-AROUND CULTURE

ثقافـــة دايـــر مـا يدور

2020 – 2024

Implemented by MitOst / zusa, Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy (Culture Resource), L'Art Rue, MMAG Foundation

Co-funded by the European Union

2024

Evaluation Summary

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KOΛEKTIVA for social innovation and culture x edgeandstory impact for culture and development

The Programme

All-Around Culture Programme (AAC) aims to foster a vital cultural ecosystem as an enabling environment for social and economic inclusion of young people in seven countries across the Arab region, including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, and Libyan and Syrian communities in these countries.

The programme was implemented by 4 partners:

- Tandem gGmbH c/o MitOst e.V., Berlin
- Culture Resource, Beirut
- Mohammad and Mahera Abu Ghazaleh Culture and Arts Society, Amman
- L'Art Rue, Tunis

Co-funded by the European Union, All-Around Culture is a collaborative and interconnected programme which consists of 5 components implemented over a 4-year period from 2020 to 2024.

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European
Union

Below are the direct outputs of the implementation of these components:

Cultural Alliances saw the successful formulation and implementation of 11 Cultural Alliances, fostering collaboration among diverse organisations.

Youth-led Initiatives led to the implementation of 31 research initiatives and 23 production projects, and facilitated the engagement of 38 young actors in regional intercultural dialogue through a Youth-led Initiatives laboratory and mentorship residency.

Thoulathy – Cross-Border Collaboration Projects involved 30 South-South-North cultural managers in collaborative projects, resulting in the completion of mobility visits and the production of 10 collaborative projects.

Ecosystem Academies: 155 participants gathered for intercultural peer-to-peer support and exchange during three Ecosystem Academies. Additionally, a toolkit with 11 tools in Arabic and English languages was created.

Awareness & Dialogue: A policy dialogue on cultural ecosystem in the Arab region engaged with 35 policy stakeholders and resulted in a White Paper.

In addition to the thematic programme components, there was a component on administration, coordination, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

The Evaluation

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation started in mid December 2023 and was concluded at the end of February 2024. The approach was designed along the following Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):

- Identify the achievements (intended and unintended) of the programme, specifically what conditions were created for participants to achieve the intended outcomes and impact.
  → impact

- Understand blindspots in the design and implementation of the programme, specifically what wasn't done to address these.
  → relevance, effectiveness, efficiency

- Explore programme design improvement options relevant to the needs of the participants and the consortium.
  → sustainability

- Cross-cutting: Identify processes and mechanisms that enabled or disabled programme outcomes and impact.

We adopted an iterative approach with regards to data collection. An initial phase of desk research examining all existing documents and data. This was then followed by focus groups and interviews that engaged a total of 48 people. The insights from these initial data collection phases informed the themes addressed in a Futures Design Lab to imagine desirable programme futures.

A full evaluation report was delivered to the programme consortium and the European Union in March 2024.

Evaluation Team

ΚΟΛΕΚΤΙVA for social innovation and culture is a non-profit organisation that works at the intersection of social innovation, culture and sustainable development to encourage positive transition to more fair and viable futures.

Dr Matina Magkou is a researcher, lecturer and consultant in cultural and creative industries, cultural policies and international cultural cooperation. She is co-founder of ΚΟΛΕΚΤΙVA for social innovation and culture and coordinated the AAC evaluation team. Currently associated researcher at the SIC.Lab Méditerranée of the University Côte d'Azur in France, she holds a PhD in Leisure, Communication and Culture from the University of Deusto on the evaluation of cultural cooperation projects.

Laila Baza, an Egyptian senior monitoring and evaluation consultant, trainer, and aspiring scriptwriter, pursued a degree in political science at Cairo University while cultivating her passion for community service and social justice. Starting as an economic researcher, she eventually delved into project management, undertaking various projects across the MENA region. Her experience spans diverse subjects including human rights, development, and arts and culture.

Kai Brennert is the Founder of *edgeandstory*, a creative studio for data-driven insight into arts, culture and the creative industries. Currently based in Cambodia, he has worked in more than 20 countries on partnerships, strategy and evaluation in arts, culture, and the creative industries. Kai is also the author of the newsletter *curious patterns*.

Findings

Evaluation Summary Visualisation

This document serves as a public summary of the external evaluation results. The visualisations provided on the following pages aim to simplify the complexity of the programme design and illustrate both vertical and horizontal processes leading to programme outcomes and impact.

Evaluation Findings

Effectiveness: The programme's outcomes aligned with its initial objectives. Although some of the components could not be fully implemented due to unforeseen circumstances (pandemic, natural disasters and war), the programme effectively catered to diverse profiles of cultural organisations and individuals in the region, fostering interaction, peer learning and laying the groundwork for further development of a cultural ecosystem. The programme coordination was professionally assured by the consortium, which received widespread appreciation for its efforts in supporting arts and cultural actors in the region.

Efficiency: Funds were used resourcefully and the consortium addressed evolving circumstances and administrative hurdles with ingenuity and attention to detail. Resource constraints impacted the effectiveness of the mentoring component, hindering its design and execution to meet the expectations of both the consortium and the grantees. Remaining funds due to unrealised programme components were distributed to grantees as additional top-up grants to further support their projects.

Relevance: The programme was carefully designed to avoid duplication with other EU interventions in the region, drawing on insights from a needs analysis of prior

programmes in the region and the expertise of consortium partners. Grantees found the logic behind ecosystem development highly pertinent, and the research and policy recommendations extracted from the programme contribute significantly to regional cultural policy discussions. Additionally, the Europe-Southern Neighborhood collaboration component emerged as a valuable addition, showing promising potential for growth, including the development of further mechanisms to address power imbalances.

Impact: The programme facilitated capacity building for both consortium members and participants. Through targeted gatherings and an online toolbox, skills and knowledge were explicitly enhanced, while project management processes also implicitly fostered skill acquisition. As a result, a regional discourse on cultural ecosystems and collective imaginaries emerged, accompanied by heightened awareness of the challenges involved in mobilising them.

Sustainability: The programme aimed to foster long-term cultural ecosystems and succeeded in fostering new collaborations. There are, however, certain concerns regarding the project-based nature of the initiative and the further resource needs to keep the ecosystem alive. The recent announcement of funding calls by international and regional actors suggests a somewhat conducive environment for the continuation of the nurturing of a cultural ecosystem in the region. Some cultural organisations are showing noticeable reluctance to participate in EU-funded programs in the future, largely due to concerns regarding the EU's response to the conflict in Gaza.

Our external evaluation showed that the programme functioned across five discernible impact levels, each characterised by unique processes, outcomes- some of which not originally intended. The primary objective of this overview is to illustrate the clustering of inputs and outcomes within each level.
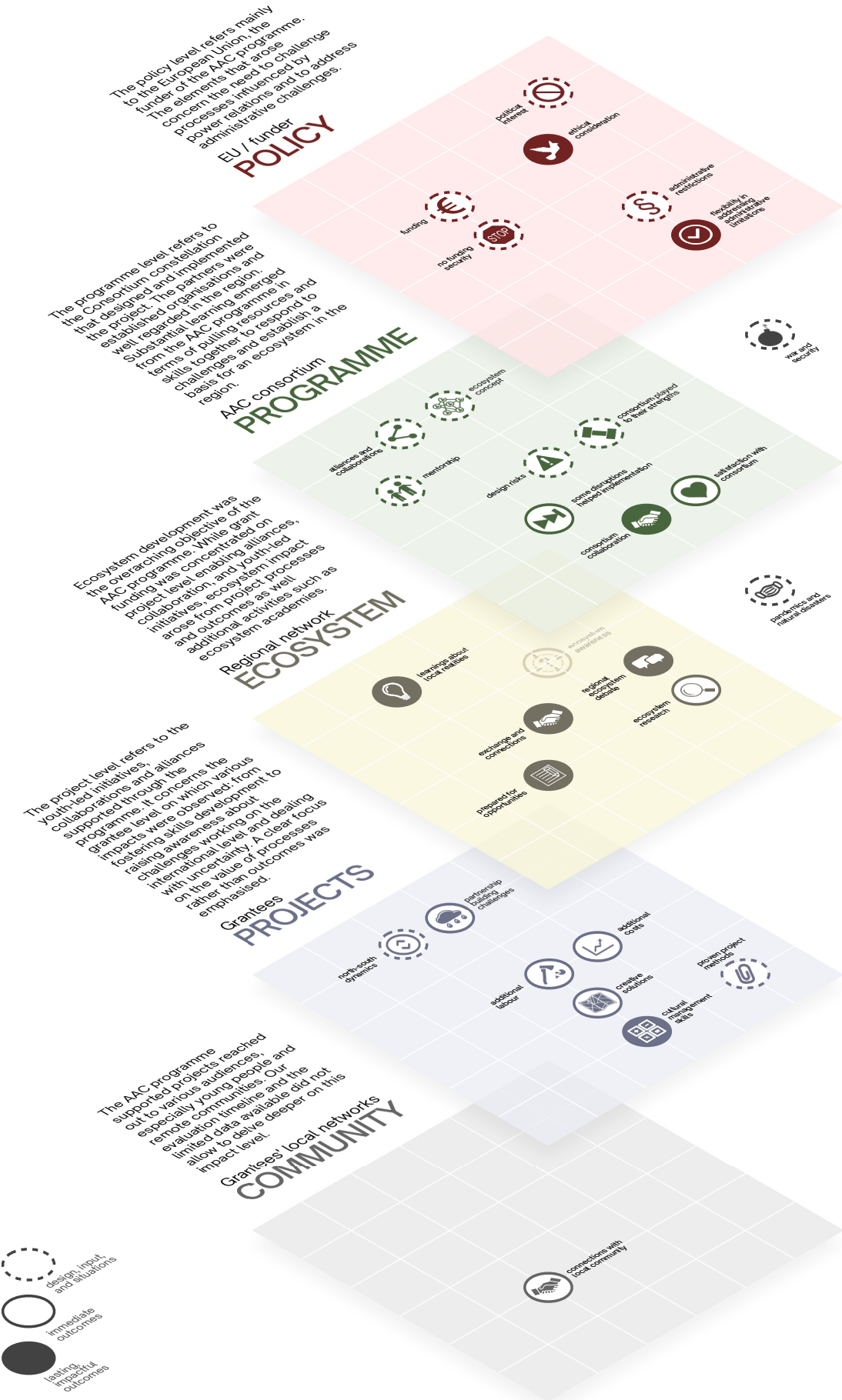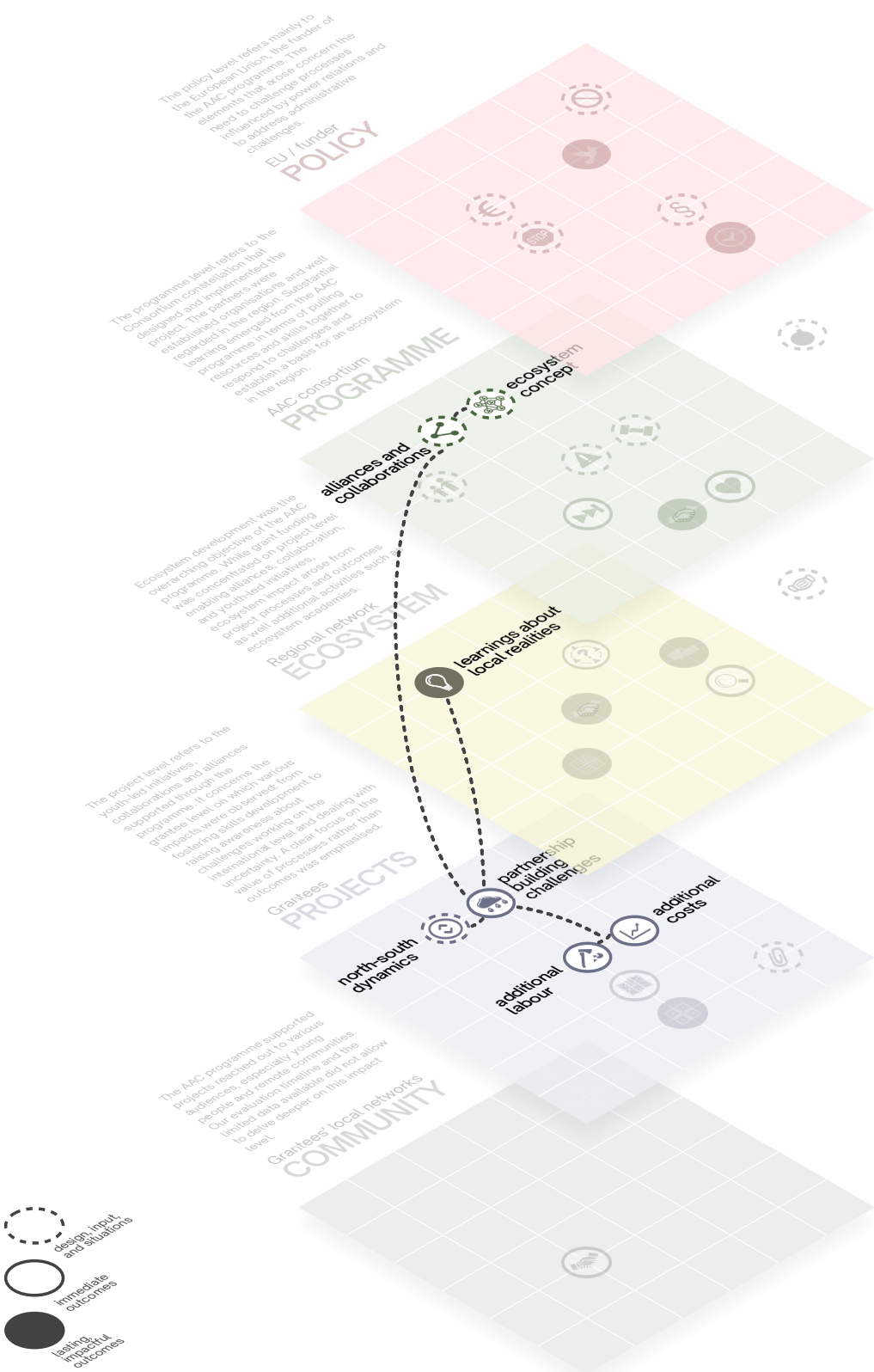
This visualisation is an illustration of a vertical relationship that demonstrates how administrative constraints, both from the EU and within grantee countries, result in additional labor and unforeseen expenses for the grantees. Nevertheless, consortium members supported grantee organisations in navigating these challenges and innovative solutions were collaboratively devised. Despite not being an intended outcome of the programme, this led grantee organisations to develop substantial skills in cultural management and project coordination during this process, contributing to institutional strengthening. The Consortium further advocated for greater flexibility in EU regulations for arts and cultural organisations in the region.
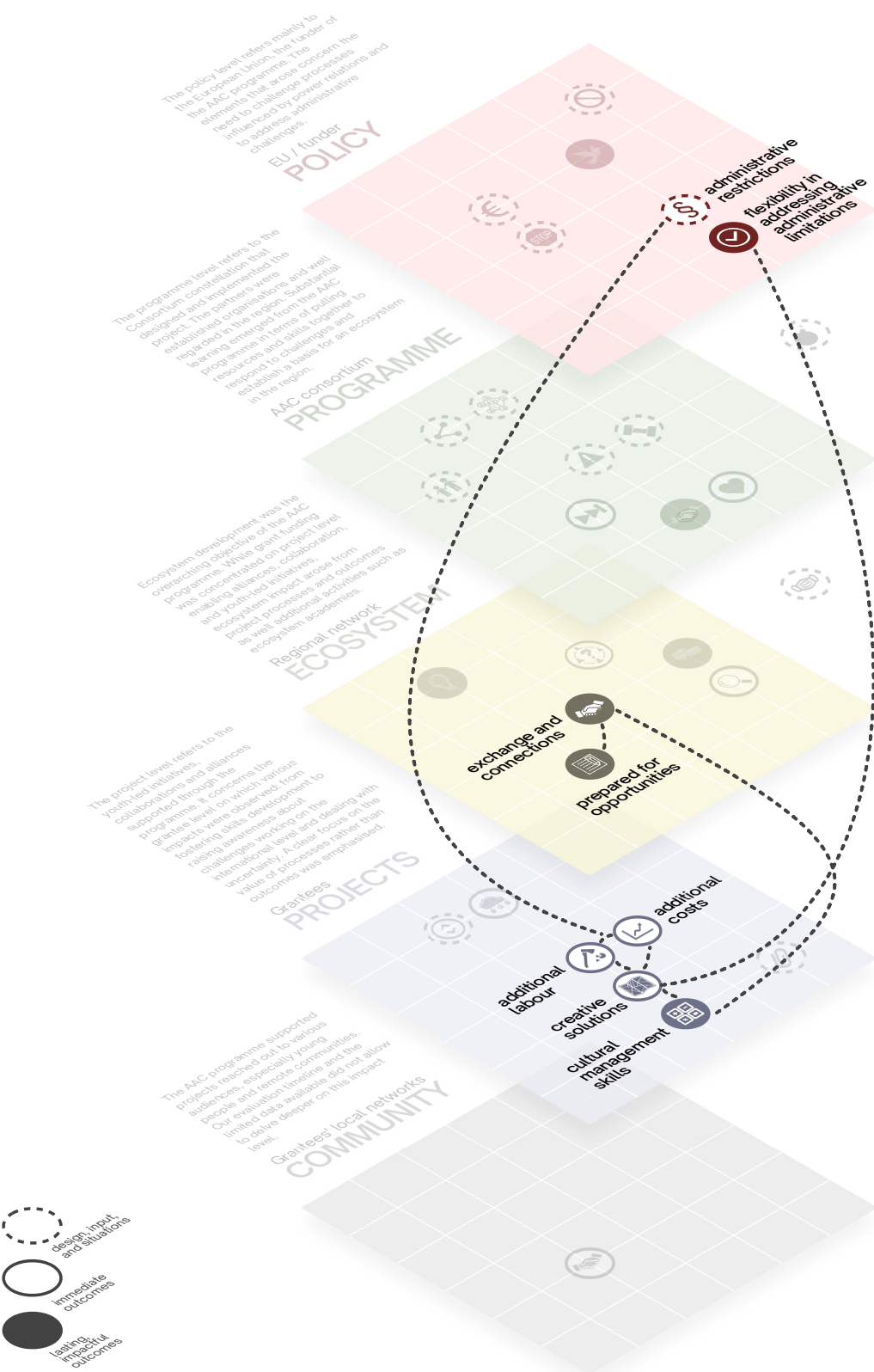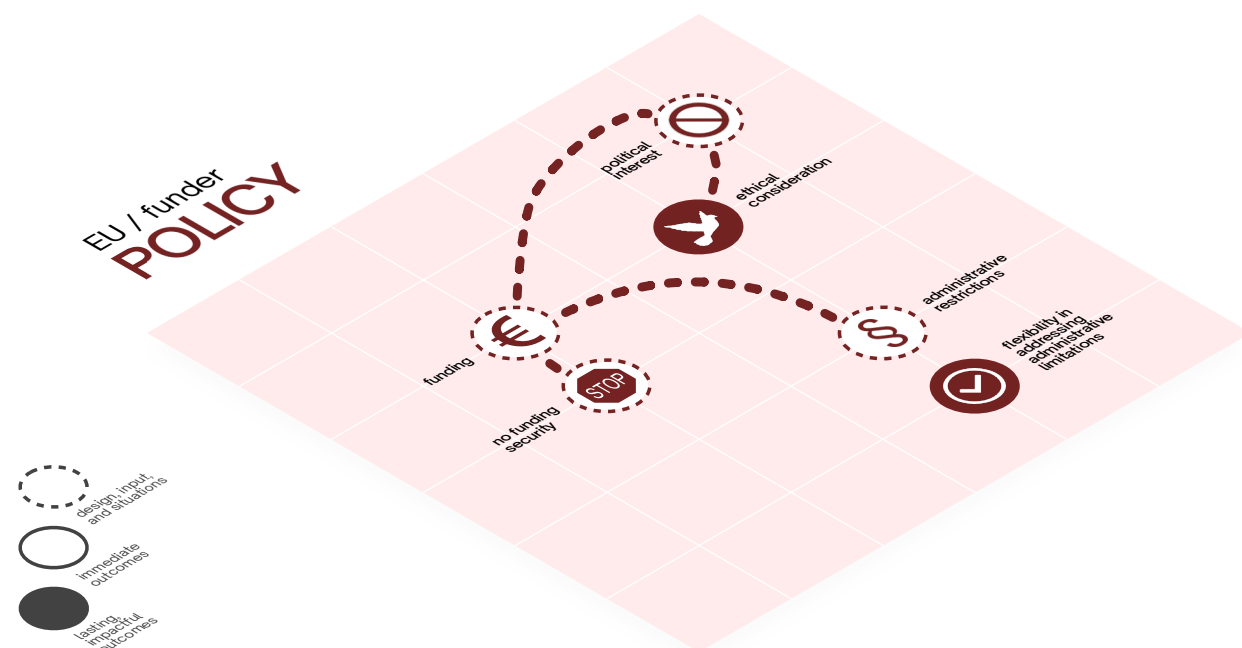
Bring a fundamental aspect of the AAC programme's ecosystem concept, the process of forging alliances and collaborations among multiple organisations encountered its share of challenges. Varying expectations, the weight of predefined roles, language barriers, and power dynamics between North and South entities sometimes hindered the partnership-building process. However, actively addressing these challenges during in-person ecosystem academies, with mentorship, and throughout placements proved instrumental in fostering a deeper mutual understanding of diverse working realities and organizational goals. This, in turn, laid a more robust foundation for cultivating a vibrant cultural ecosystem in the region.

administrative restrictions

flexibility in addressing administrative limitations

POLICY
EU / funder

PROGRAMME
AAC consortium

ECOSYSTEM
Regional network

exchange and connections

prepared for opportunities

PROJECTS
Grantees

additional costs

additional labour

creative solutions

cultural management skills

COMMUNITY
Grantees' local networks

design, input and situations

immediate outcomes

lasting, impactful outcomes

ecosystem concept

alliances and collaborations

POLICY
EU / funder

PROGRAMME
AAC consortium

ECOSYSTEM
Regional network

learnings about local realities

PROJECTS
Grantees

partnership building challenges

north-south dynamics

additional costs

additional labour

COMMUNITY
Grantees' local networks

design, input and situations

immediate outcomes

lasting, impactful outcomes

The policy level refers mainly to the European Union, the funder of the AAC programme. The elements that arose concern the need to challenge processes influenced by power relations and to address administrative challenges.

EU / funder
POLICY

political interest

ethical consideration

funding

no funding security

STOP

administrative restrictions

flexibility in addressing administrative limitations

design input and situations

immediate outcomes

lasting impactful outcomes

FUNDING
The engagements with diverse programme stakeholders underscored the vital role of EU support in cultural and artistic initiatives across the region, particularly in areas with limited government financial assistance. The EU plays a crucial role in backing arts and culture projects among civil society organisations that may lack direct government funding.

NO FUNDING SECURITY
Besides the overall praise of the programme's intervention logic, some participants openly criticised the project cycle logic of large-scale donors, suggesting that long-term thinking is needed over immediate outputs. Despite significant achievements and the expressed anticipation from programme participants for ongoing opportunities like those provided by AAC, there is uncertainty how the ecosystem can be sustained without additional dedicated funding.

POLITICAL INTEREST
While there is a comprehension of how EU programmes are conceived and aligned with political priorities, the implementation of such a programme with a decolonial mindset was an unknown challenge at various levels. Translating an EU approach to the grassroots in the MENA region and in a meaningful way, and bridging the gap between its origins and its relevance on the ground, remained challenging for many involved.

ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRICTIONS
Several regulations and bureaucratic processes have presented substantial challenges for both the AAC consortium and its grantee organisations. These constraints are particularly evident in the context of cross-border financial transactions and the difficulties associated with visa acquisition.
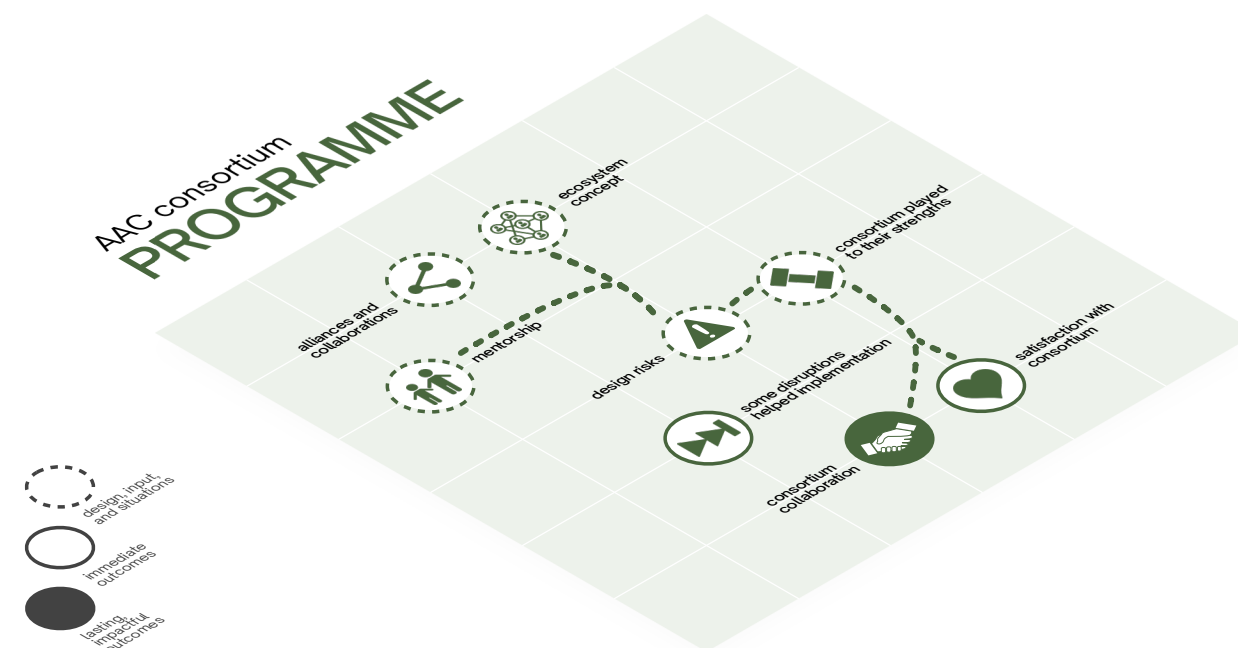
FLEXIBILITY IN ADDRESSING ADMINISTRATIVE LIMITATIONS
The Consortium's adept handling of issues throughout the programme resulted in favourable outcomes and unintended advocacy successes. Emphasising the significance of expressing concerns, even within organisations accustomed to donor-driven frameworks, proved instrumental in envisioning fairer and more operationally realistic systems on the ground.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
Both the EU and the consortium should be aware of concerns raised by some grantee organisations related to Europe's response to the ongoing war on Palestine. Some organisations openly questioned their willingness to continue working with EU-funded programmes in the absence of visible political alignment. This sentiment also translated into direct advocacy requests by grantee organisations for their peers in Palestine.

The programme level refers to the Consortium constellation that designed and implemented the project. The partners were established organisations and well regarded in the region. Substantial learning emerged from the AAC programme in terms of pulling resources and skills together to respond to challenges and establish a basis for an ecosystem in the region.

AAC consortium
PROGRAMME

ecosystem concept

alliances and collaborations

mentorship

design risks

consortium played to their strengths

some disruptions helped implementation

satisfaction with consortium

consortium collaboration

design input and situations

immediate outcomes

lasting impactful outcomes

CONSORTIUM PLAYED TO THEIR STRENGTHS
The programme had been crafted by acknowledging the strengths inherent in each organisation and the capacity of the consortium to deliver such an EU-funded programme. The consortium displayed a readiness to exchange their individual expertise in grantmaking, cultural policies, and advocacy, along with experience in community engagement, artists support and cross-border collaborations.

CONSORTIUM COLLABORATION
Derived from their solid experience working in the region and, in some cases, past collaborations, consortium partners were confident in their ability to create a collaborative environment fostering mutual growth and support. What initially started as "transactional" trust within the partnership evolved into "emotional" trust, evolving alongside the intensity of the programme.

DESIGN RISKS
All consortium members agreed that they embarked on the project embracing a collective willingness to take risks in an unfamiliar domain that was beyond their control or expertise, which was reflected in their collaboration to deliver each work package. Resilience in dealing with unforeseen situations (COVID-19, war on Palestine, natural disasters) was also noted.

MENTORSHIP
The inclusion of mentorship as a programme component made conceptual sense to the partners, but the practical implications and implementation for such a diverse range of organisations and their varied needs were unclear. Although the mentorship component was appreciated by grantees, it was perceived as inadequately tailored or constructive, especially during online follow-ups.

ECOSYSTEM CONCEPT
The adoption of the ecosystem concept in the project design felt appropriate from the outset, but there was considerable uncertainty about how to effectively establish such an ecosystem, especially in the MENA region – a context in which arts and cultural organisations are primarily accustomed to serving as grantees or beneficiaries.

ALLIANCES AND COLLABORATIONS
Nearly all beneficiaries emphasised the significance of collaborative alliances, highlighting the benefits of exchanging experiences and learning from peers. It spurred the formation of new partnerships locally and across the region. Support for intra-regional exchange is relatively novel and should prioritise well-facilitated in-person human connections as a cornerstone of ecosystem development in the future.
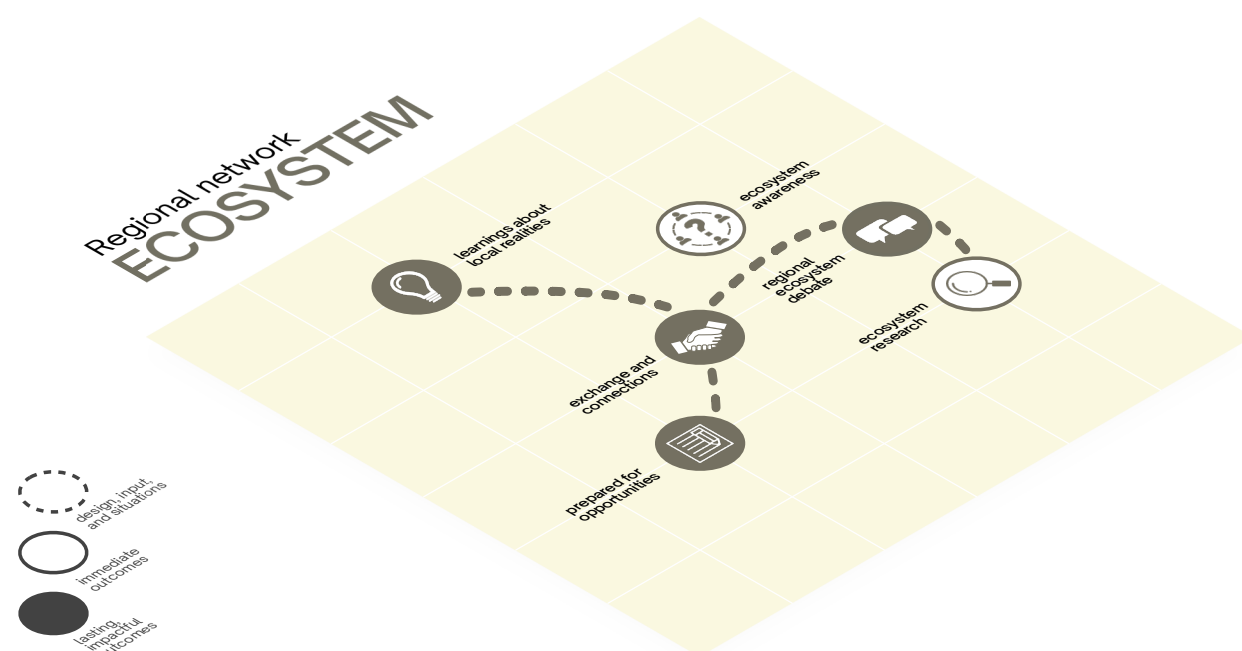
SOME DISRUPTIONS HELPED IMPLEMENTATION
The implementation of the programme commenced amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, propelling partners into "uncharted waters." Despite initial challenges, partners acknowledged that the situation, occurring at the programme's outset and deemed a force majeure, provided them with the flexibility to reassess programme elements, adapt, and make necessary changes.

SATISFACTION WITH CONSORTIUM
The AAC consortium implementing the programme received acclaim from participants. Participants lauded them for their remarkable supportiveness, openness, flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and their dedication to establishing safe spaces for all involved.

Ecosystem development was the overarching objective of the AAC programme. While grant funding was concentrated on project level enabling alliances, collaboration, and youth-led initiatives, ecosystem impact arose from project processes and outcomes as well additional activities such as ecosystem academies.

The project level refers to the youth-led initiatives, collaborations and alliances supported through the programme. It concerns the grantee level on which various impacts were observed: from fostering skills development to raising awareness about challenges working on the international level and dealing with uncertainty. A clear focus on the value of processes rather than outcomes was emphasised.

ECOSYSTEM AWARENESS

Participants, including grantees, mentors, and consortium members, unanimously recognised that the All-Around Culture programme made a substantial contribution to raising regional awareness about the mobilisation of a cultural ecosystem. Nevertheless, some grantees still lack a holistic understanding of the programme and do not see themselves as vital contributors to the establishment of a cultural ecosystem.

REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM DEBATE

Grantees highlighted how the AAC programme was instrumental in creating a regional debate around the ecosystem concept. Through ecosystem academies, commissioned research, and the alliances and collaborations, participations were encouraged to reflect and act upon the ecosystem concept. The programme successfully heightened participants' awareness regarding their roles within the ecosystem, fostering an understanding of interdependencies and the realisation that growth cannot be achieved in isolation.

ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH

The commissioned research adopted an unconventional methodology aimed at addressing cultural policy issues from the grassroots level, positioning cultural and arts organisations and professionals as active contributors in the design and implementation of cultural policies, drawing inspiration from the concept of commons. The policy paper produced provides a thorough reflection of the results of the programme and the main elements arising from its implementation and the interaction with various stakeholders.

PREPARED FOR OPPORTUNITIES

Organisation's increase in cultural management skills together with the knowledge of local realities across the region and important seeds for future collaborations planted, many grantees feel significantly better prepared to react to potential future opportunities similar to the AAC programme.
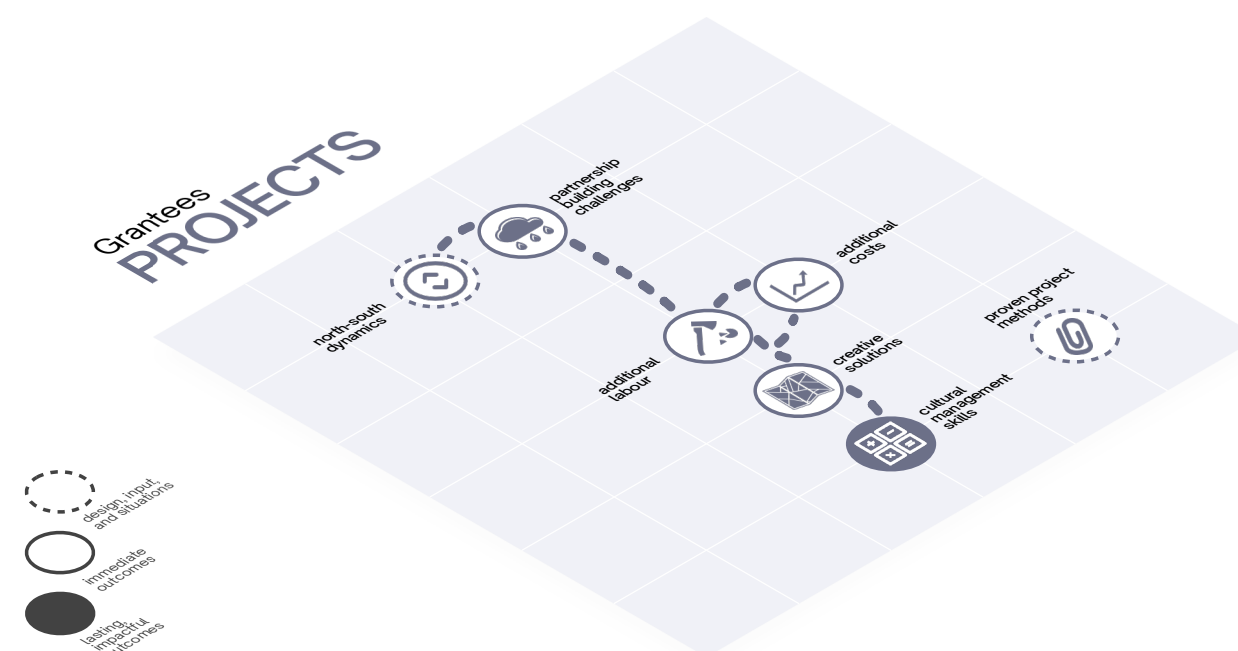
LEARNINGS ABOUT LOCAL REALITIES

The programme facilitated critical reflections on North-South collaborations and enabled partner to overcome their "contextual ignorance" to some extent. Realisations and learning about local realities, however, was not exclusive to North-South-South collaborations but also emerged from in-person meetings when projects met their peer organisations from the region.

EXCHANGE AND CONNECTIONS

The consortium partners acknowledged the necessity of synergy and collaboration in the region- although they did not know "how much it was needed", which became more apparent through the overwhelming number of applications, requests for further call rounds, and the limited familiarity among individuals in the region. Grantees express that important seeds have been planted, connections forged, and solidarity nurtured, further expanding the ecosystem.

PROVEN PROJECT METHODS

In several cases grantees opted to adhere to familiar project methodologies, and in some cases, continued existing projects, thus minimising risks associated with trying new approaches. This decision was made deliberately to strike a balance between the novel aspects of collaboration with multiple partners and the navigation of new managerial and administrative challenges.

CULTURAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS

The enhancement of arts management and project administration skills within grantee organisations deserves special recognition, besides the fact that this may not have been an initially planned outcome. For some, the programme served as their first real foray into project management with multiple partners, providing valuable learning experiences through hands-on involvement and peer exchanges.

NORTH-SOUTH DYNAMICS

Apparent power imbalances, evident in bureaucratic, logistical, and security challenges faced by Southern partners, can lead to misunderstandings. This lack of contextual understanding may underscore a deeper issue of power imbalance, where responsibilities and risks are distributed unevenly, potentially unbeknownst to the Northern partner.

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Especially for organisations in countries pre-selected to manage the funds, navigating administrative responsibilities was extensive. Negotiating the intricacies and obstacles of local bureaucracies also presented a noteworthy learning curve for many participants. Together with the consortium members, creative solutions were devised to tackle these issues and still adhere to administrative regulations.

ADDITIONAL LABOUR + COSTS

Navigating partnership building challenges, EU regulations, local bureaucratic limitations, and unforeseen circumstances such as security situations and natural disasters contributed to additional labour and organisational expenses that were neither planned nor budgeted for and required the organisations with budget responsibilities in particular to mobilise additional resources.

PARTNERSHIP BUILDING CHALLENGES

To overcome programme architecture limitations, the relationship between Southern and Northern partners was built on a contractor model that did not allow a lot of margin for an equal collaboration, sharing of the budget and responsibility, and created complications and uncertainties among the partnerships.

Recommendations

POLICY / FUNDER LEVEL (EU CALL DESIGN)

- EU support in the region is crucial and should be actively encouraged through additional actions and initiatives.

- Leverage the knowledge gained from the outcomes of past interventions and funded programmes when shaping future calls. The methodologies employed by AAC offer a valuable framework for further exploration and support in upcoming interventions.

- Foresee necessary time for needs assessment and re-design of interventions in the calls so that the interventions can be as meaningful as possible.

- Create space for innovative experiments that address cultural operators in the MENA region, prioritising processes and skills development over specific outcomes.

- Embrace more flexible evaluation frameworks that prioritise capturing learning outcomes rather than rigid reporting and accountability.

- Recognise that a key aspect of capacity and impact development for cultural operators in the region involves sharing experiences and practices, both within the MENA region and with European counterparts. Design calls that facilitate such collaborations while considering how to ease logistical and operational challenges.

- Be attuned to the values of actors in the region and demonstrate flexibility in addressing them, particularly during moments of crisis.

CONSORTIUM LEVEL

- Allocate more time for the establishment of effective collaboration mechanisms among partners during the programme design phase.

- Delegate greater responsibilities to less robust partners and ensure a smooth onboarding process for newcomers, if needed.

- Advocate for and implement initiatives that emphasise processes rather than just outcomes, while also working on developing suitable evaluation frameworks to demonstrate the effectiveness of such approaches.

- Advocate for increased opportunities for collaboration within the region and highlight the value of partnerships between European and MENA cultural organisations.

- Incorporate external evaluation earlier in the programme process, fostering genuine interactions for external evaluators with various stakeholders and beneficiaries.
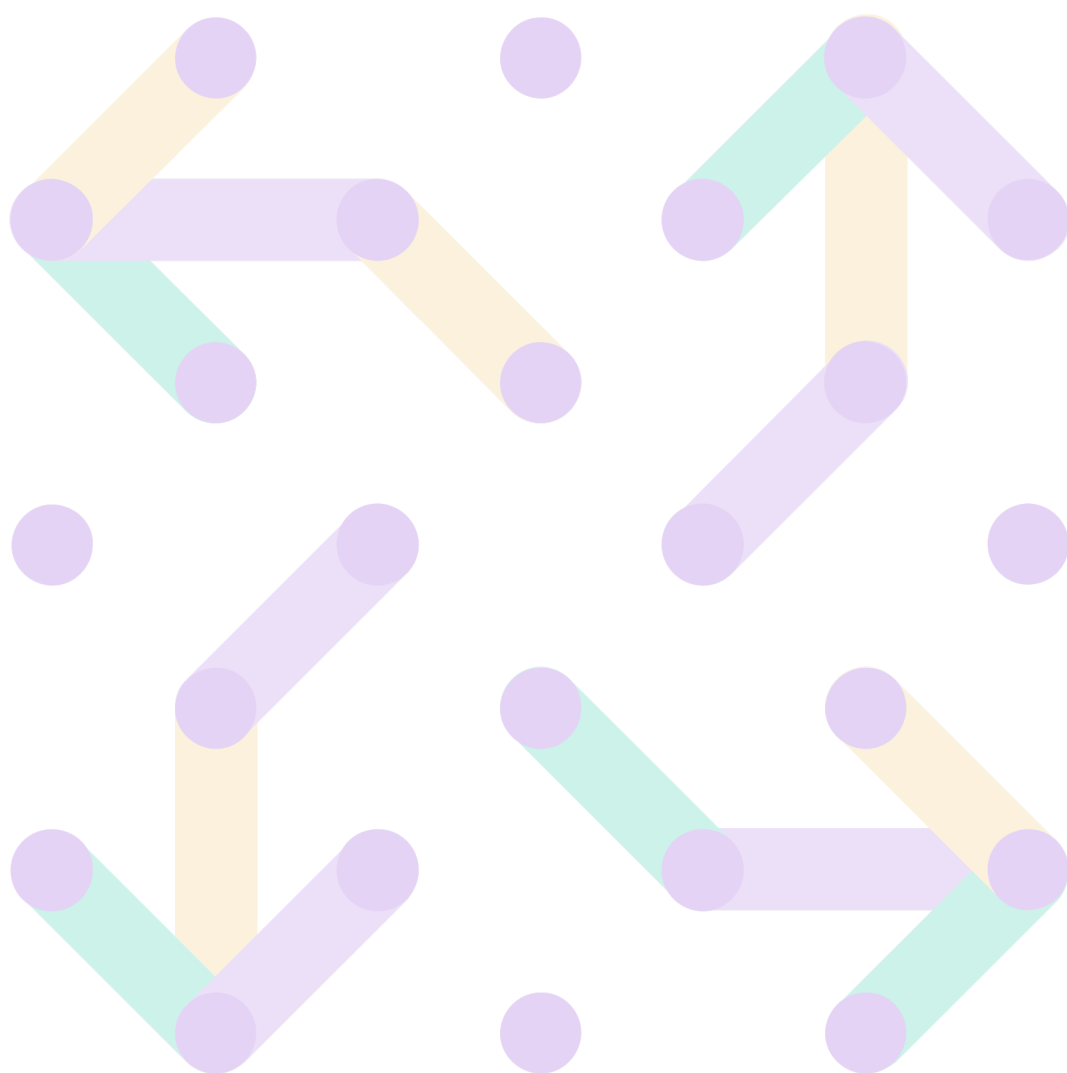
PROGRAMME CONCEPTION & MANAGEMENT

- Ensure the intervention logic undergoes a thorough reassessment and re-evaluation based on needs mapping and assessment.

- Encourage risk-taking approaches to programme design while ensuring interventions remain relevant and engage with the needs of local/ regional policy beneficiaries and stakeholders.

- Explore the methodologies proposed by researchers on commoning in developing cultural programmes. Consider experimenting with more participatory grant-making processes with shared responsibility for fund allocation, fostering a sense of responsibility beyond the beneficiary logic.

- Avoid excessive diversification of calls targeting different groups to enhance the visibility of the intervention.

- Design programme components that facilitate collaboration on various levels: artistic, managerial, different organisational units, individual, and institutional, among others. In the case of AAC this would also mean allowing more interactions among participants from the different WPs.

- Support also European partners in their collaboration journey acknowledging that there is a different learning (or un-learning) happening on their side to understand that different contexts require different solutions and approaches.

- Rework the mentorship component for the design of a similar initiative to establish clearer expectations and support frameworks.

- Find the right balance between allowing room for experimentation in collaborations and a curated guidance and support.

SUSTAINABLE "LEARNING" ECOSYSTEM

- Explore potential financial opportunities to sustain the "learning ecosystem.", especially making sure that there are fora and opportunities for practitioners to meet in person with other colleagues from the region but also from Europe.

- Facilitate online tools, virtual meetings, and other means to connect partner organisations and beneficiaries, fostering a collaborative learning environment, without undermining the value of physical meetings and exchanges.

- Share the responsibility of nurturing the learning ecosystem with beneficiaries.

- Harness the knowledge gained from operating in unpredictable and chaotic situations to develop learning modules beneficial for arts and cultural managers in the region.

All-Around Culture Programme
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