

# NEXT GENERATION OF CULTURAL SPACES

■ Project Publication



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# PREFACE

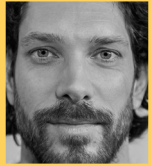
For years, the partners of the Next Generation of Cultural Spaces project have advocated for the value of access to space for non-dominant culture through actions, practising solidarity and lobbying. We are pleased that the NGOCS project has allowed us to spread this narrative beyond the boundaries of our existing venues and platforms, and to expand our orbit to the regions of Southern and Eastern Europe. In uncertain times such as these, self-organisation, sustainability and network building are critical. To create physical space for non-dominant culture we must develop new ways of working. What better way than to open up our underused historical spaces, bringing together the old with the new, to host the next generation of culture?

This report tells the stories and experiences of the NGOCS project team, as well as those of the spaces and communities touched by the project. It provides a glimpse into the journey towards enabling space, including the challenges and opportunities encountered along the way. We feel this is only the beginning of our exploration of how to provide the necessary know-how and information to emerging spaces and communities in geographically and politically diverse settings. We aim to provide the resources needed to build more stable environments for value creation and thriving, non-dominant youth culture, queer communities and other marginalised groups, because these spaces and communities constitute the future generation of culture.

the NGOCS team

**\*\*Special note:** *The NGOCS project was funded and created in 2021, before Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The consortium of the NGOCS sees the already planned program as an opportunity to re-think/add to the original objectives and investigate ways to aid spaces and their communities in urgency.\*\**

# NGOCS TEAM



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Liese is a cultural advocate and curator who brings together diverse actors to work on shared goals such as access to space in order to better the health and vibrancy of their cultural ecosystems. She is the main organizer of the Envisioning Free Space conference, in addition to being a member of Space of Urgency.



**David Lezhava**  
**ACT4Culture | Tbilisi**

David co-founded CCIUG (The Cultural and Creative Industries Union of Georgia), a non-profit umbrella organisation, and through its ACT4culture platform raised funds to aid Georgian electronic music entities, collectives, artists and sector employees.



**Giorgi Kikonishvili**  
**Creative Collective Spectrum |**  
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Giorgi is a co-founder of Horoom Nights – prominent Queer party series at BASSIANI and co-founder of Spectrum - a creative collective of artists, researchers and publicists who study and elaborate the non-dominant cultural thoughts and practices.



**Hannes Götsch**  
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Hannes is a transdisciplinary strategist, enabler and sound-instigator working in the field of cross innovation and urban-rural development processes from Venosta valley, South Tyrol, Italy.



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## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Philipp Kieser (Hospiz, Culture Assault), Sarah Trevisiol (Women's Museum Meran) and Simon Mariacher (BASIS Vinschgau Venosta) for giving their inputs on this project publication. Lastly, we thank Ivan March for co-writing the project concept.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## ■ 1.1 The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces

***The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces creates a translocal activist alliance between Berlin, Tbilisi, Sarajevo and South Tyrol to reimagine the use of historical spaces, reviving them through cultural activities to create safe spaces where non-dominant youth culture, queer communities and other marginalised groups in Eastern & Southern Europe can thrive. It runs throughout the year 2022 and is supported by the European Cultural Foundation.***

### Context

The Covid-19 global crisis, economic standstill, political polarisation and, more recently, the war of aggression against Ukraine, threaten the very existence of the social ecosystem of non-dominant youth culture, queer communities and other marginalised groups in Eastern & Southern Europe. The closure of independent cultural spaces and the disruption of creative ecosystems that have served as the last remaining safe spaces for these communities now pose an existential threat for the underrepresented.

New translocal alliances such as 'UnitedWeStream' help raise awareness of local issues internationally while making local governments take these issues more seriously. Collaborations between regions such as Berlin and Tbilisi have already shown their value for non-dominant cultural communities and the exchange of practices and movements. The only way to further develop these practices and support the long-term security of independent cultural spaces is to expand the alliance and collaborate with more regions.



Image by Jonas Tebbe



Image by Daniel Plan



Image by Mostafa Meraji

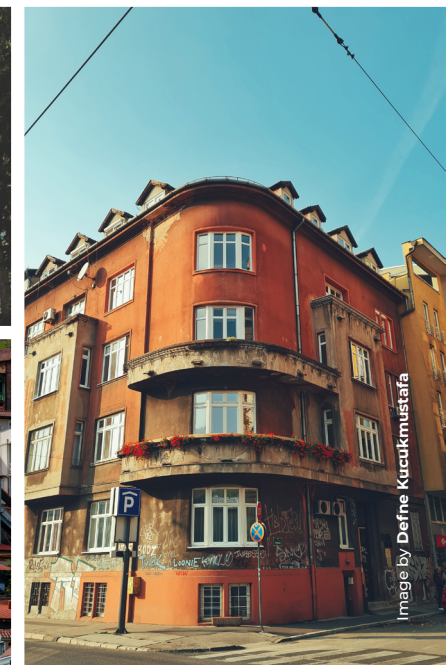


Image by Defne Kucukmustafa

## **Aims**

### **The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces' aim is threefold:**

- Bring together a translocal network of Southern & Eastern European initiatives and spaces for non-dominant culture, changemakers, advocates, academics, institutions and local governments.
- Create a direct local impact on the independent cultural ecosystems in Tbilisi and Vinschgau Venosta.
- Document the processes so that it can be developed into a bigger, thriving network that supports the development of the next generation of cultural spaces.

## **Project activities**

### **To achieve these aims it carries out the following activities:**

- Holding local conferences in each region (Berlin, South Tyrol, Tbilisi), to foster conversations with relevant individuals and strengthen the ties between local collectives and organisations.
- Involving a larger amount of independent cultural spaces and allies from the region in three online community calls to exchange practices and lay a foundation for new translocal approaches.
- Converting documentation into a growing living document aimed to support initiatives in the region facing similar hardships, whether economic austerity or extremist intolerance.

## **Outcomes**

The NGOCS project demonstrates that there is a need to continue translocal alliances. It formulates a strong vision of the next generation of cultural spaces, to be used in collaboration with independent cultural spaces and communities as well as external stakeholders. Additional data collection on the value of independent space for non-dominant culture will make the narrative more convincing for the latter. The project has brought together a large group of social-cultural initiatives, emergent spaces, independent cultural venues, urban changemakers and polit-

ical agents. To continue its mission it is important to keep coming together and collaborating, locally as well as translocally.

New digital network structures offer an opportunity to facilitate the needs of initiatives and spaces for access to information and contacts. Local involvement of a translocal alliance is a sensitive matter. It should respect the local context and empower local actors to 'do it themselves'. Ultimately it must be kept in mind that the goal is to create and preserve independent physical spaces for non-dominant culture. While defining the next generation of cultural spaces, the most important criteria are sustainability and long-term security.

## **Recommendations**

### **The outcomes can be summarised in the following recommendations:**

1. Continue to develop and spread the narrative on the importance of independent spaces for non-dominant culture.
2. Keep planning local and translocal moments of collective reimagination to advance the agenda of NGOCS.
3. Improve knowledge distribution structures for independent cultural spaces.
4. Follow-up projects should aim to appropriate physical space.
5. The next generation of cultural spaces should aim for sustainability and long-term security.

The path adopted by the NGOCS project is promising. It is based on a powerful shared narrative rooted in a broad international alliance resulting in local change-making processes. As project partners we are confident that adhering to the project philosophy will lead to tangible results in obtaining and retaining the next generation of cultural spaces.

## ■ 1.2 The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces

### Project consortium

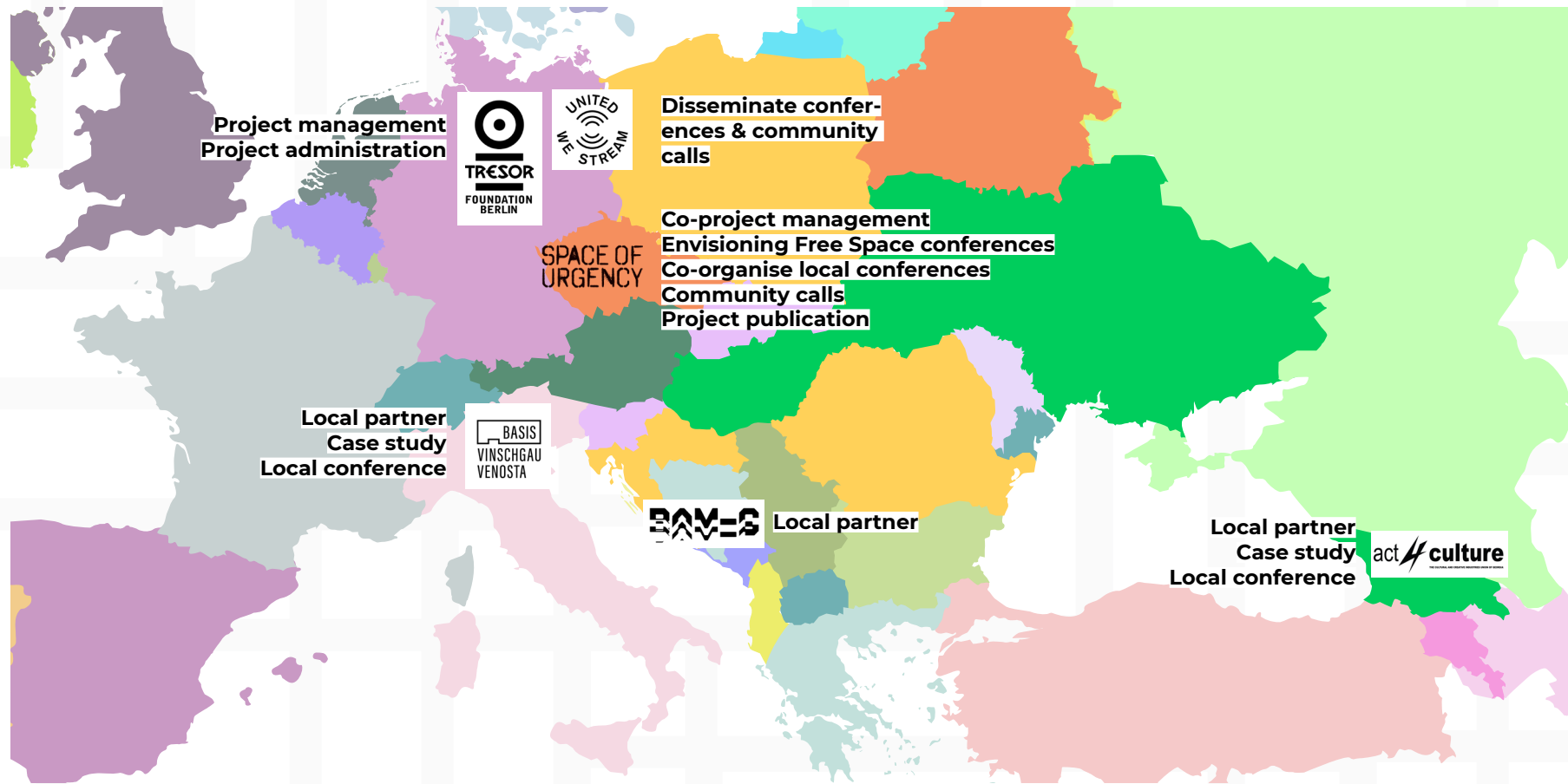
#### The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces (NGOCS) is a project by

- **Tresor Foundation** - The Tresor Foundation Berlin aims to appropriate real estate for charitable use and thus to withdraw it from speculation and secure it permanently.
- **United We Stream** - The successful fundraising campaign for Berlin clubs evolved into a global cultural platform and streaming initiative in the digital space.
- **Space of Urgency** - Space of Urgency develops strategic approaches to support self-organised communities in establishing and retaining independent spaces for non-dominant culture.
- **ACT4culture** - The Cultural and Creative Industries Union of Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, based in Tbilisi, Georgia, dedicated to the development of cultural and creative communities and unites the pluralistic practices of non-dominant culture and contemporary arts.
- **Neocor** - The Association for Procreation and Development of Future Ideas - Neocor (NCR) aims to build and amplify new cultural projects and ideas in the larger area of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **BASIS** - BASIS Vinschgau Venosta is the wide-ranging reuse project of the former Drusus barrack in Silandro, functioning as a Social Activation Hub for regional and social development in the areas of economy, culture, education and social affairs.





Diagram 1 shows the locations of the project partners as well as their roles in the NCOCS project.



## Project participants

During the NGOCS project the following initiatives & spaces have taken part in the translocal alliance.

Space / initiative	Location
ABSEA studio	Batumi, Georgia
Astoria Cinema	Rimini, Italy
Avant.Dev	Mexico City, Mexico
Bassiani	Tbilisi, Georgia
Bude	Kutaisi, Georgia
Cirkulacija2	Ljubljana, Slovenia
Community and Cultural Centre Rojc	Pula, Croatia
Creative Collective Spectrum	Tbilisi, Georgia
Diwan of Culture, Design & Innovation (DCDI)	Istanbul, Turkey
DKC Sarajevo	Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Emil Filla Gallery	Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic
F.A.C. - FormArtCulture	Auer/Ora, Italy
Fix in Art	Thessaloniki, Greece
Galerija Savremenih Umjetnosti Manifesto	Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Georgian Music Legacy Collection	Tbilisi, Georgia
Habibi.Works	Ioannina, Greece
Heart of Noise	Innsbruck, Austria
Hospiz Festival	Neumarkt/Egna, Italy
House of ReconNEXTion	Tbilisi, Georgia
iN club	Baku, Azerbaijan
Kanepes Cultural Centre	Riga, Latvia
La Fabrica Terminal	Manizales, Colombia
LabIC Novale	Jaraguá do Sul, Brasil
Left Bank	Tbilisi, Georgia
LIFT - spatial initiatives	Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
LOKAL Tbilisi CoWork and CoLive	Tbilisi, Georgia
Magnete (Adriano Community Center)	Milan, Italy

Manifesto Gallery	Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mozaika Bar	Tbilisi, Georgia
Mtkvarze	Tbilisi, Georgia
Na Kalvárii	Prague, Czech Republic
ODRON	Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Open Space	Tbilisi, Georgia
Openspace.innsbruck	Innsbruck, Austria
Os Pato Bravo	Lisbon, Portugal
Ost-West Club	Meran/Merano, Italy
Project Fungus	Tbilisi, Georgia
Psychedelic Society Berlin	Berlin, Germany
Psydefects	Istanbul, Turkey
Reflector	Kutaisi, Georgia
Rizoma Coop	Lisbon, Portugal
Rokva Festival	Racha, Georgia
Salaam Cinema	Baku, Azerbaijan
Sintetik	Baku, Azerbaijan
SODAA	London, United Kingdom
Somalgors74	Tschlin, Switzerland
Studio 12	Passau, Germany
Tek Bunker	Tirana, Albania
Tiers Lab	Strasbourg, France
Tunel 22	Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Untitled Tbilisi	Tbilisi, Georgia
Waking Life	Crato, Portugal

The following cultural institutes and local governments have taken part in the alliance.

Organisation / institute	Location
CCA - Center of Contemporary Art	Tbilisi, Georgia
Dance of Urgency	-
Department of Culture	Bozen/Bolzano, Italy
DIY Space Project	Toronto, Canada
Equality Movement	Tbilisi, Georgia
MOCI Balkans	-
MOCI South-Caucasus	-
MUA Architecture & Placemaking	Tbilisi, Georgia
Museion	Bozen/Bolzano, Italy
NVU MuNJA	Podgorica, Montenegro
Rural Radicals	-
Trans Europe Halles	Malmö, Sweden
Women's Museum	Meran/Merano, Italy

### 1.3 Project context

The Covid-19 global crisis and imposed restrictions, coupled with economic standstill and political polarisation have threatened the very existence of the social ecosystem of non-dominant youth culture, queer communities and other marginalised groups in Eastern & Southern Europe. Additionally, the war of aggression against Ukraine has deeply shaken the European cultural ecosystem as a whole. The closure of cultural spaces and the disruption of creative ecosystems that have served as the last remaining safe spaces for these communities now poses an existential threat for the underrepresented. Additionally,

right-wing extremism is on the rise, as demonstrated by recent violent attacks in Eastern European countries, with casualties at Pride events in Tbilisi, Kyiv, Belgrade.

Disruption of the creative ecosystem has birthed new partnerships via “Localised Internationalism” with new translocal alliances developing projects during the pandemic such as ‘United we Stream’, which helped raise awareness about local issues internationally while making local governments take these issues more seriously.

Collaborations between the three regions have existed for a significant time now. The bridges and exchanges between Berlin and Tbilisi have already affected a large number of otherwise repressed com-

munities, not only in Georgia, but also in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine, to name a few. The vibrant cultural processes, unanimously dubbed as “rave-olution” from Georgia have influenced the waves of new practices and movements in Berlin.

Cultural practices are never static and can only be developed with input from larger groups. Many awareness and sustainability practices in Berlin stem from the international communities that did this work first. The only way we can continue to develop inclusive and diverse practices is to collaborate with more regions.

### Changing circumstances

The original plan of the NGOCS project was to follow and support the process towards opening an independent cultural space in Sarajevo – in the historical Hotel Igman – in order to document the process and make it transferable to initiatives in the region, as well as to develop a sister project in Tbilisi. Early in the project it became clear that this plan needed adjustment. The Igman Hotel was sold to a private investor as soon the city noticed the interest from the translocal NGOCS alliance in transforming it into a cultural centre. This underlines the difficulty of opening an independent space for non-dominant culture, often lacking financial means to compete with the commercial market. It also illustrates the need to find innovative ways to obtain and retain independent cultural spaces. Unable to follow a real-life process, the NGOCS project switched its focus to supporting local cultural ecosystems in their struggle to obtain space for non-dominant culture. Moreover it tried to understand how a translocal alliance can better support the needs of existing and new spaces.

As part of the original project plan, the local conferences and community calls remain in place. Over the course of the project we came to the conclusion that Neocor from Sarajevo would not organise a local conference. The underlying reasoning for this is further explained in section 1.4. BASIS Vinschgau Venosta stepped in by offering to host a conference in their space in South Tyrol. With BASIS, the NGOCS project gained an experienced partner that manages a successful, long-standing cultural space situated in historical former military barracks.

### **Local conferences**

In November 2021, the NGOCS project was publicly launched during the Frei(T)räume / Envisioning Free Space conference in Berlin. In November 2022, at the same conference this time in Amsterdam, the project results were presented for the public closure of the project.

During the year 2022, two local conferences were organised, one in South Tyrol, Italy and one in Tbilisi, Georgia. The local conferences not only reinforced ties between local cultural initiatives and spaces, but also nurtured their relationship with cultural institutes and city governments. Multidisciplinary participants were invited to both conferences, addressing the current local situation for non-dominant cultural initiatives and discussing how the next generation of cultural spaces can be created.



NGOCS South Tyrol conference  
Image by Arno Bouma

### **Reimagining historical spaces**

In addition to the conference events a multiple day program was set up, in which members of the project collective visited vacant historical sites in the region. Together with local actors, and in some cases the property owners, the spaces were reimagined for the purposes of non-dominant culture for marginalised groups.

Both conferences successfully instigated local collaboration. In South Tyrol several follow-up events were initiated. The events are collaborations between local cultural collectives and institutes, such as the modern and contemporary art museum. They focus on building a local cultural mycelium towards the creation of new independent cultural spaces. A process that will continue in the year 2023. In Tbilisi the conference helped bring local cultural actors closer together and contributed to the ongoing process of obtaining a historical space in Rustavi, a city just outside of Tbilisi.

### **Case studies**

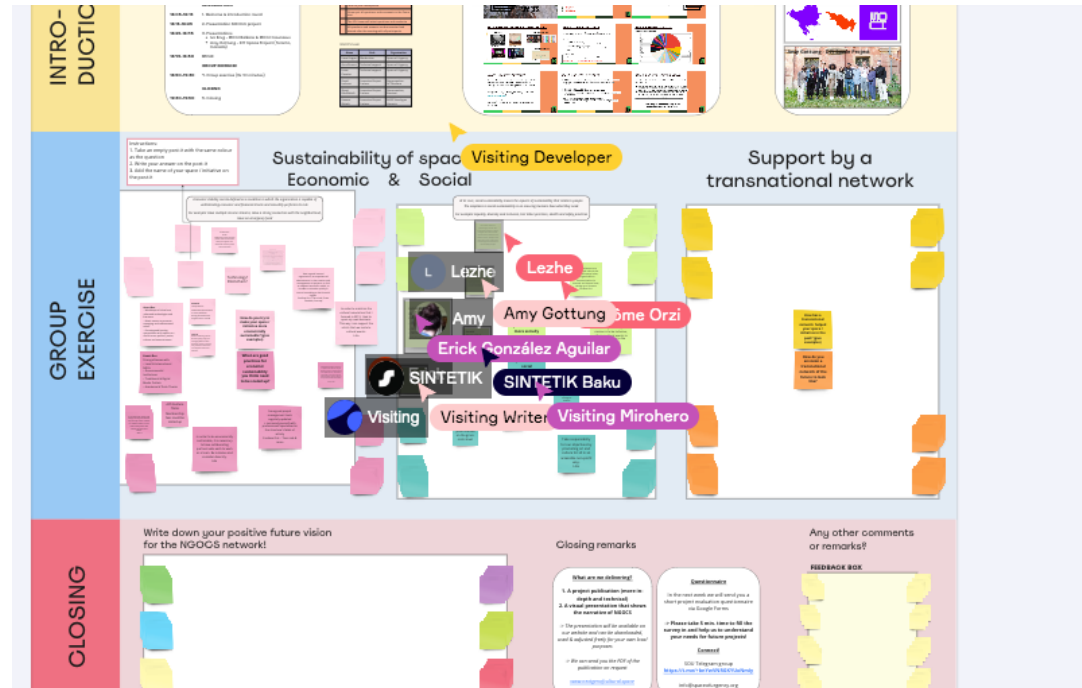
Whereas BASIS Vinschgau Venosta has its own space, ACT4culture is deeply involved in a recently created independent cultural space in Tbilisi, named House of ReconNEXTion. Both BASIS and ReconNEXTion have inspiring and unique approaches to how they have obtained and are running their spaces. These approaches have generated important learnings and good practices for other spaces and initiatives in the region. This publication will include a case study of both spaces, including a brief description of their local cultural context for a better understanding of their backgrounds.

## Community calls

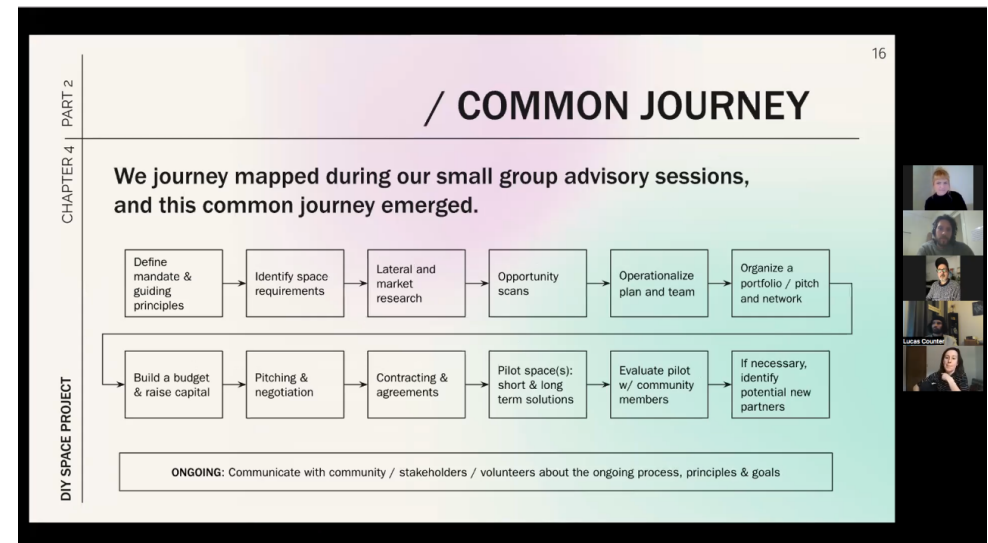
In addition to its local work, Space of Urgency has organised three online community calls. The calls invited a larger network of spaces and initiatives to exchange knowledge on the obstacles they have encountered in obtaining and retaining their independent cultural spaces. The second purpose of the calls was to gather feedback on the needs of the participants and to discuss how a translocal alliance such as the NGOCS can support these needs.

## Documentation

Through ongoing reflection and discussions with project partners, the above activities have been compiled into this project publication. After outlining the background story of project partner Neocor in section 1.4, the publication contains a glossary of relevant terminology and definitions used by the project. Section 3 describes the project activities, starting with the two case studies of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta and House of ReconNEXTion, and a description of the opening and closing conference and the three online NGOCS community calls. The closing chapter presents a definition of what we would define as a 'next generation cultural space'. It aims to give a roadmap for the further development of the concept by working out key learnings and recommendations for continuation.

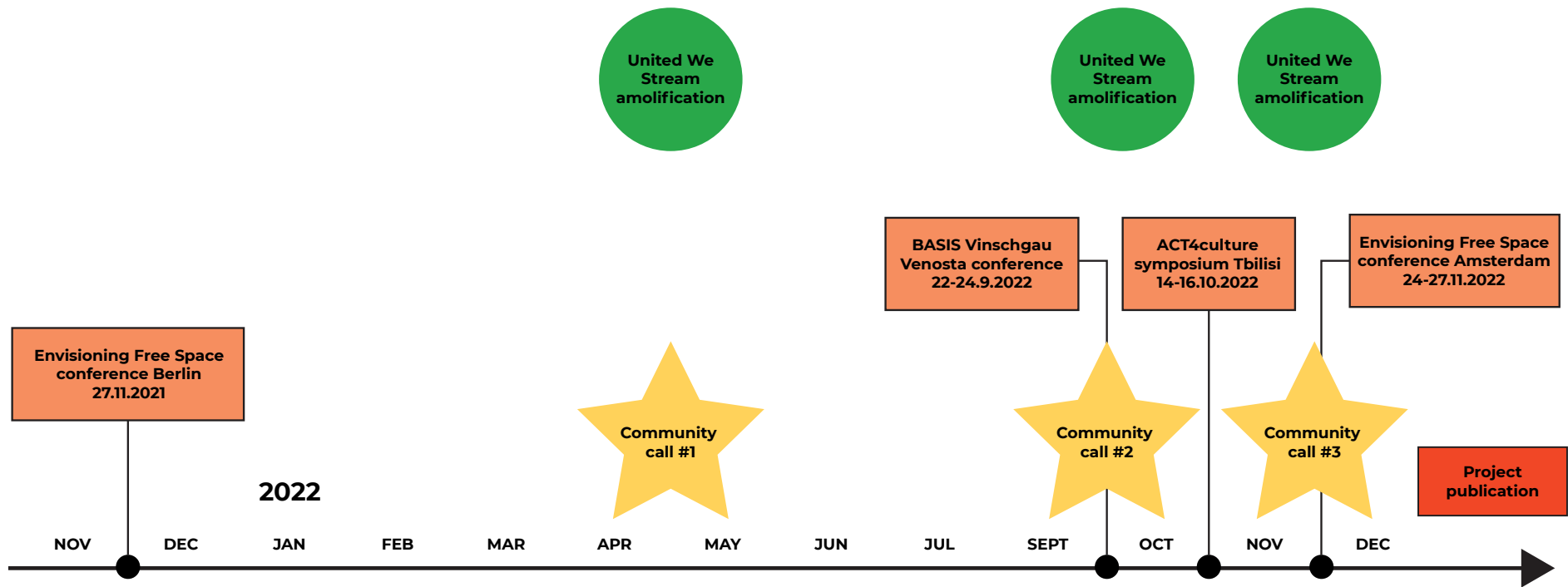


NGOCS Community Call  
Image by Space of Urgency



NGOCS Community Call  
Image by Space of Urgency

Diagram 2 Project activities timeline



## ■ 1.4 Partner context: Neocor

### Socio-political context

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country located in the Balkan region of Europe. Its political situation is complex due to its ethnic and political divisions, which are a result of the country's turbulent history. Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, which triggered a brutal war that lasted until 1995. The war was marked by widespread violence, mass displacement, and war crimes committed by all sides involved. During the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is mainly populated by Bosniaks and Croats, and the Republika Srpska, which is mainly populated by Serbs. The war had a significant impact on the country's demographics, as many people were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. The war also had a profound impact on the country's political situation, as it left deep ethnic and political divisions that continue to shape the country's political landscape today.



Image by Milana Jovanov

Since the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been struggling to build a stable and prosperous country. The three main ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats - have different political and national aspirations, and this has led to significant political tension and instability in the country.

The history of war and the deep ethnic and political divisions that resulted from it continue to play a significant role in the struggles of the region today. Political and economic power is often distributed along ethnic lines, which can lead to discrimination and marginalisation of certain groups. The country's political institutions are often deadlocked due to ethnic tensions, which can hinder progress in areas such as economic development, education, and social welfare.

### Influence on the project

Overall, the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is shaped by a complex web of historical, ethnic, and political factors, which have contributed to ongoing challenges in building a stable and prosperous country. This complex system of government has therefore made decision-making for our project partners very difficult and has also slowed down the project's progress in many areas.

During the course of the project the team from Neocor has changed, with some of the team members leaving due to personal circumstances. The remaining team was smaller and had less capacity to realise a local conference. The conference planned in Sarajevo was meant to make a local impact and pave a long term strategy in collaboration with local politicians

and other stakeholders. In summer, also due to the Russian war on Ukraine, the political situation in the Balkans had become more unstable, with tensions between Kosovo and Serbia flaring up again. On the one hand, the Neocor team did not feel comfortable organising an international conference in this situation. On the other hand, they felt there was currently not much space for building long term strategies with political actors - given the overall situation in the Balkans.

A combination of the mentioned factors above has led us to decide that it's not beneficial for the total project and especially for the Neocor team to continue and organise a local conference, since it would have demanded a lot of capacity from the local partners, with the resulting impact being highly uncertain.

### Outlook

Nevertheless, fostering spaces for arts and culture in these war-torn countries is essential for promoting healing, reconciliation, and social cohesion. By providing a means of expression, building bridges across divides, preserving cultural heritage, providing economic opportunities, and fostering a sense of hope and possibility, arts and culture can help to promote long-term healing, social cohesion, and sustainable development in these contexts.

In summary, a translocal alliance like we built with the NGOCS project can still play a crucial role in supporting the development of independent cultural spaces in the Balkans, by bringing together diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources over a longer period of time than the funded timeframe.

## 2. GLOSSARY

The glossary entails central terms of the Next Generation of Cultural Spaces project and provides the definitions the project is applying.

### ■ Eastern & Southern Europe

The NGOCS project uses a broad definition of countries in Southern & Eastern Europe, including:

- **Southeastern Europe** - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey
- **Central Europa** - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia
- **Southern Europe** - Andorra, Gibraltar, Italy, Kosovo, Malta, Monaco, Portugal, San Marino, Southern France, Spain
- **South Caucasus states** - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

- **Baltic States** - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania
- **Non-Baltic Post-Soviet states** - Belarus, Ukraine<sup>1</sup>

### ■ Historical spaces / sites

- A historic site or heritage site is an official location where pieces of political, military, cultural, or social history have been preserved due to their cultural heritage value. Historic sites are usually protected by law, and many have been recognized with the official national historic site status. A historic site may be any building, landscape, site or structure that is of local, regional, or national significance. Usually this also means the site must be at least 50 years or older.<sup>2</sup>

### ■ Independent cultural space

- Any permanent, physical space dedicated to cultural activities, that is neither a commercial venue nor a major institution.<sup>3</sup>

### ■ Living document

- A living document, also known as an ever-green document or dynamic document, is a document that is continually edited and updated.<sup>4</sup>

### ■ Marginalised groups

- Marginalised populations are groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.<sup>5</sup>

### ■ Next generation of cultural space

- The definition of the next generation of cultural space is explained in detail in section 4.3.

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern\\_Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Europe)

2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic\\_site#cite\\_note-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_site#cite_note-1)

3 <https://www.independentspaceindex.at/about>

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living\\_document](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_document)

5 <https://cutt.ly/m8pyEJh>



## ■ Non-dominant culture

- Non-dominant cultural identities historically and currently have fewer resources and influence than dominant identities. It's important to remember that these distinctions are being made at the societal level, not the individual level. There are obvious exceptions, but the overall trend is that differences based on cultural group membership have been institutionalised. As a result of this uneven distribution of resources and power, members of dominant groups are granted privileges while non-dominant groups which are at a disadvantage encounter institutionalised discrimination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism, limited access to resources, support, and social capital.<sup>6</sup>

## ■ Safe space

- a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm.<sup>7</sup>

## ■ Translocal alliance

- an open process that produces exchanges and close interrelations between different places and people, creating communities and networks;<sup>8</sup>
- an agreement to work with someone else to try to achieve the same thing<sup>9</sup>

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6 <https://cutt.ly/58pyR9n>

7 Oxford Dictionary

8 <https://cutt.ly/q8pyYiy>

9 Cambridge Dictionary



# 3. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

## ■ 3.1 Introduction

This section describes the activities carried out within the NGOCS project, taking place between November 2021 and November 2022. It starts with 2 extensive case studies. The first on House of ReconNEXTion and the city of Tbilisi, Georgia. The second on BASIS Vinschgau Venosta and the autonomous province of South Tyrol, Italy. Both case studies exist out of an introduction in the local cultural context, followed by a detailed description of the two participating cultural spaces. It highlights the NGOCS conferences held in both regions, completed with local learning and recommendations.

The second part of the chapter describes the participation of the NGOCS project in the FreiT(r)äume / Envisioning Free Space conferences of 2021 and 2022. Furthermore it highlights the three online community calls with a wide range of initiatives and spaces from Southern and Eastern Europe. Both parts are concluded with learnings and recommendations.

## ■ 3.2 House of ReconNEXTion / Tbilisi, Georgia

ACT4culture a platform created by the Cultural and Creative Industries Union of Georgia, is the official partner of the NGOCS project. ACT4culture is housed in Tbilisi in a shared creative space named House of ReconNEXTion. ReconNEXTion houses a number of non-dominant cultural initiatives, of which some play an active role throughout the project. It is an inspiring example of non-dominant cultural collectives working together to create an independent space in a non-supporting environment. For these reasons the House of ReconNEXTion is included as example space in the following case study of Tbilisi.

### 3.2.1 Local cultural context Tbilisi

Georgia is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, situated between the Greater and Lesser Caucasus mountain ranges. Since it is located at the intersection of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, Georgia is considered to be a transcontinental country. It is bordered by the Black Sea to the West, by Russia to the North and Northeast, by Turkey to the Southwest, by Armenia to the South, and by Azerbaijan to the



House of ReconNEXTion, Tbilisi, Georgia  
Image by House of ReconNEXTion

Southeast. Georgia is a small country (69,700 km<sup>2</sup>) with a population of 3.7 million. Tbilisi is its capital as well as its largest city, home to roughly a third of the Georgian population (1.2 million).

## **Historical context**

A former Soviet Union republic, Georgia gained its independence in 1991 and has suffered a number of economic crises, ethnic conflicts that culminated in two wars with Russia (1993 and 2008) since then. Currently, 20% of the country's territory is still occupied by Russia. Georgia is considered to be a poor & developing country with GDP per capita slightly above \$5,000, high unemployment (18.5%) and its economy is currently ranked 120 in the world.



The geographical conditions and historical path resulted in the country's social, cultural and political bonds with different, sometimes opposing arrangements and layouts such as with old Greeks and Romans, Byzantine and Turkish/Arabic world, Mongols, Persians and Russians. Thus, Georgia's culture, archi-

itecture, folklore and traditions, its past and modern times are highly influenced by the ancient pagan, Christian and Muslim heritage, crowned with its own endemic and unique Caucasian characteristics, making it one of the diverse countries and cultures in the region.

## **Socio-political movements**

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Georgia's way to building a democratic society based on justice and equality has been met with constant clashes from various business, right-wing and conservative groups both from inside and outside the country. On its turbulent way of finding and constructing a new identity (or coming back to the roots of liberal, social democratic order dating back to 1918-1921, three years of independence before being recaptured by the USSR), various strongholds of civil society and cultural groups are fighting to defend and spread the democratic values.

Considering all this, the current cultural movements and practices, especially initiated by the young, post-Soviet generation takes even more political meaning and is met with constant attempts of oppression and domination by state, orthodox church and other political or social institutions, who want to maintain the status-quo - a definitive source of their power.

This geopolitical cultural fight was fueled even further since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022. The mass demonstrations were staged by local civil society groups in support of Ukraine and Georgia's democratic, pro-EU direction. According to some calculations, the scale of the protest rally ex-

ceeded hundreds of thousands - the biggest ever in the history of Georgia, a clear sign that the full majority of society has an agreed vision on the present and future of the country. However, it comes as no surprise that the above-mentioned religious groups and the ruling political establishment with close ties with Russia see this uprising as a threat to their authority and power - forcibly leaving the country at the crossroad again, between the old, corrupted, oppressive system and new, free, the democratic will of society.

In this process, the union of modern artistic movements, especially the empowering and creating network of underrepresented, non-dominant youth / LGBT / Queer / feminist collectives - a main target of pro-Russian, far-right, anti-Western groups, becomes of even higher political importance. However, or possibly exactly for this reason, those collectives represent the main force of the new narratives and perspectives, which are being created in the underground world of Georgia and are gradually spreading outside, in the streets, and in the daily life of society.

## **Availability of space**

During the Soviet Union times, all cultural spaces were under governmental ownership. After the independence from Soviet reign in 1991, all state assets in Georgia were quickly privatised and currently, there are no available structures left in state control. Mainly for this reason, we do not have any private-to-public partnerships (PPP) in Georgia.

The current influx of Russian/Ukrainian and Middle Eastern nationals has greatly increased the demand for an already limited quantity of real estate in Georgia. Prices have gone through the roof both for rental

and acquisition of available spaces countrywide (83% and 112% respectively). Such development had a negative impact on the local population and the current prices in Tbilisi are comparable to those in the developed European cities.

### **The House of ReconNEXTion**

Historically, Tbilisi had always been the cultural centre for the South Caucasus, a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural meeting point for different nationalities from neighbouring countries. After the fall of the USSR, ethnic conflicts flared in all the countries of the region, prompting refugees to emigrate to Georgia in search of safety. The new waves of immigration were fuelled by the latest developments in the region - a Belarusian uprising, the Armenian-Azerbaijani war in Karabakh and most lately, the Russian-Ukrainian war. In addition to this, many artistic and activist civil groups, especially from queer and non-dominant cultural communities, who're under constant oppression from their Governments, see Georgia as the safest shelter in the region.

In such a political environment, the House of ReconNEXTion attained regional importance. Since its founding, the space has served as a meeting point for artists and activists from Armenia, Azerbaijani, Ukraine and Belarus. Various activities, such as film screenings, performances and exhibitions took place in collaboration with community members from neighbouring countries who now live in Georgia. A three days long short film festival was organised by an international group of activists, during which over fifteen movies were screened by the movie directors from Mariupol - a seaside city of Ukraine that was devastated during the ongoing war.

Additionally, Klara serves as the informal gathering space for the community, constantly sharing thoughts and ideas, coming up with new initiatives and collaborations, deepening the ties with each other and with this, creating a regional network of like-minded groups.

### **The next generation of cultural spaces**

The next generation of cultural spaces in Georgia will have to be embedded in the local cultural context, involve multiple stakeholders and accommodate both for-profit and not-for-profit cultural entities.

### **3.2.2 Case study: House of ReconNEXTion**

Statistics

<b>Location</b>	ReconNEXTion is located in the Tbilisi district of Chugureti, which is largely made of buildings constructed in the 19th century/beginning of the 20th century.
<b>Founding Date</b>	February 2022
<b>Main function</b>	Co-working space/meeting room/discussions room/exhibition space
<b>Size</b>	300 square metres
<b>Number of Employees</b>	None
<b>Yearly revenue</b>	None

### **Introduction**

House of ReconNEXTion is a collaboration between queer artists, researchers, publicists and creative collectives to help regenerate and revitalise the diffused structure of social and artistic life by co-using Art and Science, academia and interdisciplinary activities. The Covid-19 pandemic, its ensuing restrictions, economic crisis, political polarisation and the rise of right-wing radical political groups endangered the presence and safety of the social ecosystem of non-dominant youth culture, queer communities and other marginalised groups. Recent violent attacks (such as the July 5th pogrom of Tbilisi Pride) stimulated the renewed process of emigration at an alarming rate within the young generation, creative minds and queer people, who're forced to leave their homelands to seek safety and freedom of expression. This indicated an urgent need of reconnecting the communities, re-establishing the creative process, rejoining the forces, finding common, safe

spaces and artistic collaborations, where the disintegrated social and non-dominant cultural ecosystem would thrive again.

## **Activities**

- Research and publication series in collaboration with Indigo Magazine;
- Exhibition series in collaboration with Fungus;
- Online web-magazine 17maisi.net & Spectrum website;
- Publishing the book “100 Years of Georgian Queer Arts”;
- Publishing the book “Queer Protest History in Georgia”;
- Publishing the book “Queer Poetry Collection”;
- Small support grants for independent emerging LGBT/Queer and woman artists
- Vinyl Record in collaboration with BASSIANI/HOROOM Records;
- Video Essays from feminist perspectives;
- Documentary film “Twinkling Nights” on the nightlife, style and recent cultural history of the Georgian queer community, arts and performances;
- Artist talk & discussion series;
- Transgender and non-binary performance series;
- Call Me Nata - transgender comedy monologue series;
- Contemporary Music and Queer Arts festival and forum series.

House of ReconNEXTion is a three-floor building that includes co-working spaces for various collectives.

## **Creative Collective Spectrum**

The Research Network in Queer Studies, Critical Thought and Socio-Cultural Transformations



## **Project Fungus**

Queer artists collective



## **GrizWave**

Feminist multimedia platform



## **Horoom Nights**

Queer party series at BASSIANI



## **ACT4culture**

Pluralistic, inclusive and free practices of non-dominant culture and contemporary art



## **Muzame**

Festival of contemporary music, DIY culture and queer arts



The space also includes queer arts gallery Fungus, a discussion and public meetings room, a music/video studio and Klara - an artistic bar for various cultural activities such as live music evenings, poetry readings, transgender comedy series, community gatherings and more.

## **History**

The space was obtained at the outset of the Covid-19 crisis in Tbilisi, in February 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic and two years of lockdowns with the collateral economic downturn had a massive negative effect on the creative industry in general and as a result, a number of important cultural and creative outlets have disappeared. Many existing lease agreements had been cancelled and the artistic and creative sector, especially from non-dominant youth culture and queer communities (most of which are non-profit entities) were left without spaces by the spring of 2021. To remedy and recalibrate a new tough reality, by the end of summer 2021, we teamed up with several sister cultural organisations and chose to develop a pilot project that would serve as a shared safe space and unite collaborative like-minded organisations, collectives, artists and activists.

The working group was created with the representatives of 7 non-profit cultural organisations. The quest for finding a common/shared space started in September 2021, as the group approached Tbilisi City Hall. After some search that went on for about a month, the Arts/Culture department of the City Hall informed us that the City had no available buildings on its balance sheet and the only option to move forward was to look for a space in the commercial real estate market.

A collective of participant organisations/stakeholders (7) was established (internal stakeholders/the size of the property determined the scale of the project); Most of the project participants were non-profit entities and relied solely on local and international grants/donors.

### **Organisation**

The project was named “House of ReconNEXTion” with the legal form of a not-for-profit organisation. In Georgia, such organisations are called: Non-entrepreneurial Non-commercial legal entities.

Creative Collective Spectrum served as an umbrella organisation, executed a one-year-long agreement with a private owner, and leased a 3-story small building in a commercial market in Tbilisi. The executed lease agreement provided Creative Collective Spectrum with the right to sublease the property to all internal stakeholders listed above. This statute in the lease agreement grants the umbrella organisation (Spectrum) the ability to collect funds internally between stakeholders in an efficient manner and distribute them towards common expenses.

Each participating organisation/collective received an individual working space in ReconNEXTion and shared the following spaces between them: meeting room, discussions room, exhibition hall, storage room and cafeteria. For the management of the space, a board was created, which includes a representative from each participating collective/organisation.



— 2022

## **SAFE SHARED SPACE**



*Space for re-establishing the process of social interaction, rejoining the creative forces and finding the common grounds where the disintegrated youth and non-dominant cultural ecosystem will integrate, strengthen and thrive again.*

Union of non-binary queer artists and thinkers to empower the unapologetic creative impulses and facilitate their realization. The SSS includes working & meeting rooms, artist studios, workshops, talks & discussion spaces and a gallery.

### **Income and expenses**

As all participant collectives were non-profit artistic and cultural organisations, the biggest challenge was the limited combined income to fund all activities. All non-profits faced the similar issue of being overdependent on public funding. Additionally, Covid-19 and the economic downturn in Georgia had sharply impacted the state support of arts and cultural organisations through funding cuts.

Since public funding had been unreliable and could be downsized in the future, we have decided to diversify the business model (from existing grant-based only funding) for the House of ReconNEXTion and look at additional ways to generate income. Our ob-

jective was to explore a multi-faceted business model that could be economically sustainable and incorporate both nonprofit and for-profit legal structures.

For this reason, we have launched a subsidiary for-profit organisation “Klara” (avant-garde bar), fully dedicated to artist talks and performances. The primary intention in forming a for-profit entity under the management of a non-profit was to generate additional income and reinvest the surplus it generates in the mission and activities of the non-profit. This type of hybrid model provided ReconNEXTion with the following benefits: a) guarantees the project over time has necessary cash flows to meet ongoing financial obligations; b) loosens the reliance and removes the stress nonprofits constantly undergo

when securing future funding/grants; c) provides ReconNEXTion (including all internal stakeholders) with additional funds to support its artistic, cultural and creative activities.

The single most significant expense for ReconNEXTion is the building rental cost. Most of this sum is collected through all participating organisations; The second comes utility payments (electricity, internet, water, garbage collection); and the third is the cleaning and building maintenance costs. The main income stream comes from public funding in the form of various grants (roughly about 80% of all costs). The remaining 20% is generated through a subsidiary for-profit entity (Klara Bar).

## **Community**

Besides direct interaction during the exhibitions, artists' talks and discussions and symposiums, which include hundreds of attendees depending on the scale of the event, multiple resources are used to reach and involve the target audience - local, regional and international magazines, friendly online media, community gatherings and social media platforms.

Target groups and communities involved in the space as workers, volunteers and attendees;

- LGBTQI community, collectives and individuals;
- Artists, researchers and creative thinkers who're generally interested in modern artistic, social and cultural life;
- LGBTQI individuals who might not be directly active in the central parts of Georgia, but are following the currents of LGBTQI life from the peripheries;

- General audience who's interested in the social and cultural processes;
- Socially active groups and individuals;
- LGBTQI groups, collectives and individuals from neighbouring countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine.

## **Added value**

Georgia has now already a long tradition of queer/feminist activism, which has played a significant role in transforming society and its attitudes for good, but art and sciences have not been so intensively used in combating the challenges. In contrast with this, ReconNEXTion collectives teamed up to respond to the obstacles by combining different artistic and academic mediums, as the most powerful way to empower the community and to have a strong, consolidating impact on society.

Different artistic mediums had been used by different activist groups in the past, but what makes the ReconNEXTion exceptional is that the proposed activities are not fragmental and one-time happenings, but rather it's a structured, organised and artistically curated long-term process with its sequence, timeline and pre-mediated long-term effect.

What also makes it innovative is that the project is not focused on a particular art or academic form, rather it unites artists, curators, publicists, activists, anthropologists, culturologists, art critics and researchers from different fields or professional backgrounds.

The added value of the project is that it was established as a non-profit entity in conjunction with social enterprise - Klara bar, which serves as a cultural

space with direct income, providing additional financial support and transforming the union into a more sustainable entity.

## **Local impact**

The aim of the creation of the House of ReconNEXTion is to examine the power of interdisciplinary artistic activism and spaces for social change and cultural transformation. We had acknowledged that such an ambitious goal could only be a premeditated, long-term process and the impact of it on the general society can only be measured and be visible after years. Thus, we decided to measure the initial impact on the more local, short-term level first, to test, evaluate and observe if our modus operandi is workable. Only afterward could we think of bringing the space and its activities to the next, more general scale.

## **The tangible, distinct impact of the project within the first nine months of its implementation is as follows:**

- Creation of a space for under-represented critical thinkers, who're outcasted from the major, general cultural institutions and broader communities. Artists and activists who are critical not only to the general society and its widely accepted, conservative status-quo, but are also questioning the political agenda, microsystem and attitudes within the community itself - a space for reflection and critical self-reflection; space for emerging, new talents and thinkers who could found the basis for the new narratives, instead of already established narratives within the community.

- With this, the creation of new networks became possible. Artists, who participated in public discussions, talks, exhibitions and informal gatherings, befriended each other, pushing and empowering themselves to start new collaborations. Considering the positive feedback on the topics which are usually hidden from the radars of the heteronormative, dominant culture, many artists were encouraged to work in a more direct, unapologetic way, to unleash what's been hidden and bring to light what's been forbidden.
- The power of arts in social transformation has been tested on the local, urban scale. The House of ReconNEXTion and Klara is situated in the usually tough neighbourhood, near the central railway station. This part of the city has been one of the central points of criminal gangs in the past. Opening a queer/feminist art gallery and bar was a challenging act due to security reasons. However, our intentional open door policy, direct and casual, friendly communications with the neighbourhood translated into befriending them, many of the neighbours are constantly visiting the exhibitions (with erotic and nearly pornographic artworks exhibited quite frequently) and Klara bar too. This once again proved to us that overcoming obstacles together and building bridges are possible with direct, casual, friendly communications aided by the language of art - antagonised groups within the society can agree when the communications are free and independent from the intervention of a biased political and religious establishment.
- Staring to and analysing life through the eyes of a comedian has been a crucial part of overcoming homo/bi/transphobia and sexism in frames of our activities. Klara regularly hosts the first-ever stand-up comedy series from the Georgian transgender activist Nata Talikishvili. Titled as Call Me Nata, the monologue series reveals the life of Georgian queer and especially the transgender community. Nata, as a narrator, shows the everyday life of transgender people to the audience in satirical ways. With an improvisational synthesis of tragedy and comedy, she creates a unique, characteristic form of drama that evokes special love and admiration in the audience. Becoming increasingly popular, Call Me Nata helps to overcome transphobia within the community and empowers many to find new ways of self-expression.
- Creating a regional network of artists and activists has had a profound impact on the House of ReconNEXTion. After months of joint activities, artists and interested individuals from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Belarus are now participating in the social and cultural life of Georgia, staging performances and exhibitions, attaining new friends and with this, not only integrating with the Georgian society but also bringing and sharing the knowledge and experience from their unique cultural perspectives.
- Notwithstanding the fact that the House of ReconNEXTion was initiated only a year ago in March 2022, its impact has been already visible for global media outlets and art communities. Museum of Modern Arts (NY) published a long feature story about resistant Georgian art collectives from the last century, maintaining a focus on Fungus as the most notable movement in Georgia right now. <https://post.moma.org/an-underground-bridge-to-georgian-collectiveness-finding-a-tribe-through-collective-trauma/>,
- while BBC has published a new feature story recently about “Georgia’s surprising LGBTQ+ scene”, stating that “In socially conservative Tbilisi there is a thriving LGBTQ+ scene, with comedy, clubbing and art at its core.” <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20230124-the-comedian-fighting-prejudice-with-laughter-in-georgia>



### 3.2.3 Tbilisi Symposium

#### Location & date

Fabrika, Tbilisi, Georgia - 14-16 October, 2022



NGOCS Tbilisi Symposium  
Image by Philipp Kieser

#### Program & participants

Friday, 14 <sup>th</sup> of October	
12:30	<b>Opening of Symposium:</b> David Lezhava (ACT4culture, Tbilisi)
13:00	<b>The Next Generation of Cultural Places: Introduction</b> Presenter: <i>Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency, Berlin)</i>
13:40	<b>The Next Generation of Cultural Places: House of ReconNEXTion</b> Moderator: Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency, Berlin) Presenters: David Lezhava (ACT4culture, Tbilisi), Giorgi Kikonishvili (Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi), Nukri Tabidze (Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi), Davit Apakidze (Project Fungus, Tbilisi).
14:15	<b>MUA Architecture &amp; Placemaking: Transform Spaces into Places</b> Moderator: Rezi Khuntselia (Tbilisi) Presenter: Marika Kvirkvelidze (MUA, Tbilisi)
15:30	<b>Dance of Urgency</b> Moderator: Rezi Khuntselia (Tbilisi) Presenter: Bogomir Doring (Dance of Urgency, Amsterdam)
16:30	<b>The Next Generation of Cultural Places: BASIS Vinschgau Venosta</b> Moderator: Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency, Berlin) Presenter: Hannes Goetsch (Basis Vinschgau Venosta, Silandro)
17:00	<b>Panel Discussion: Interdisciplinary Art &amp; Cultural Spaces</b> Moderator: Rezi Khuntselia (Tbilisi) Panellists: Ksenia Nam (Untitled, Tbilisi), Aleksi Soselia (CCA, Tbilisi) Misha Charkviani (Open Space, Tbilisi) Nika Khotcholava (Left Bank, Tbilisi), Natia Chikvaidze (Projector, Tbilisi).

<b>18:00</b>	<b>The Sustainable impact of a vibrant night culture for a growing city development</b> Presenter: Dimitri Hegemann (Tresor Foundation, Berlin)
<b>19:00</b>	<b>Panel Discussion: The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces</b> Moderator: Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency, Berlin) Panellists: Dimitri Hegemann (Tresor Foundation, Berlin), David Lezhava (ACT4culture, Tbilisi), Hannes Goetsch (BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, Silandro), Giorgi Kikonishvili (Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi), Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency, Berlin), Phillip Kieser (Culture Assault Records, Hospiz, Bozen), Chris Koubek (Heart of Noise, Innsbruck)
<b>19:00</b>	<b>Exhibition: Resilience</b> Location: Fungus Gallery Artists: Anka Gujabidze, Dato Koridze, Giorgi Nebieridze, K.O.I., Mano Svanidze, Noni, Uta Bekaia (all Tbilisi).
<b>20:00</b>	<b>Artist Talk: George Nebieridze (Berlin)</b> Location: House of ReconNEXTion
<b>21:00</b>	<b>Performance: Creative Collective Spectrum - RIRI</b> Location: Avant-garde bar Klara
<b>Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> of October</b>	
<b>12:30</b>	<b>ACT4culture: Electronic music &amp; club culture in Georgia</b> Presenter: David Lezhava (ACT4culture, Tbilisi)
<b>13:00</b>	<b>Georgian Music Legacy Collection: Independent Georgian music scene - its importance and its legacy.</b> Moderator: Rezi Khuntselia (Tbilisi) Presenters: Jaba Shavishvili (Georgian Music Legacy Collection, Tbilisi), Natia Sartania (CCA, Tbilisi)
<b>13:30</b>	<b>Panel Discussion: Cultural Life In Regional Context</b> Moderator: Rezi Khuntselia Panellists: Nata Beshidze (Rokva Festival, Racha) Akaki Saginadze (Reflector, Kutaisi), Levani Dzeladze (Bude, Kutaisi) Lasha Guruli (ABSEA studio, Batumi) Nodar Beridze (Mtkvarze, Tbilisi)

<b>14:00</b>	<b>Panel Discussion: Creative Voices Shaping Balanced and Equitable Culture</b> Moderator: Ana Marjanidze/3AM (Tbilisi) Panellists: Sophie Phare, Ani Kvirkvelia, Nasi Chavchavadze, IAMEA, Masho Goes (all Tbilisi)
<b>15:15</b>	<b>Panel Discussion: Physical Spaces for Social Transformation</b> Moderator: Rezi Khuntselia (Tbilisi) Panellists: Naja Orashvili (Bassiani, Tbilisi) Giorgi Kikonishvili (Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi), Ketii Shavgulidze (Art Historian, Tbilisi), David Kakhaberi (Equality Movement, Tbilisi), Mariam Paitchadze (Haraki, Tbilisi), Irakli Areshidze (Mozaika Bar, Tbilisi)
<b>16:00</b>	<b>Panel Discussion: South Caucasus in Focus</b> Moderator: Nino Lomadze (Indigo, Tbilisi) Panelists: Nukri Tabidze (Researcher, Anthropologist, Tbilisi) Giorgi Rodionov (Artist, Untitled gallery) Aynur Abutalibova (Salaam Cinema, Baku)
<b>17:00</b>	<b>Tbilisi Queer Tour</b> Guide: Paata Sabelashvili
<b>19:30</b>	<b>Artist Talk: TransSoundScapes</b> Location: Avant-garde bar Klara Artists: Banu (Istanbul), Irakli Kiziria (Berlin), 3AM (Tbilisi)
<b>20:00</b>	<b>Talk: Call Me Nata</b> Presenter: Transgender activist Nata Talikishvili (Tbilisi) Location: Avant-garde bar Klara
<b>22:00</b>	<b>TransSoundScapes Record Release Night</b> Location: Bassiani/Horoom

## **Summary of activities**

The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces Symposium in Tbilisi started on October 14th with presentations and panel discussions at Fabrika. Fungus Gallery held a joint exhibition of 7 Georgian queer artists, entitled “Resilience”. Concurrently, House of ReconNEXTion hosted discussions by Berlin-based Georgian photographer George Nebieridze. The same evening, Creative Collective Spectrum held artist’s talks at Avant-garde bar Klara. Activities for the day were concluded with a visit to techno club Bassiani, which hosted performances by Antony Rother, Kancheli and DJ Rolando.

On October 15, David Lezhava (ACT4culture) and Dimitri Hegemann (Tresor Foundation) travelled to Rustavi city (20 km. from Tbilisi) to meet with the representative of the local government and inspect an available historic site.

On October 16th, NGOCS Symposium continued with a full day of presentations and panel discussion at Fabrika. Conference was followed by a 4 kilometre-long Queer tour of Tbilisi, guided by Paata Sabelashvili; artists talk, called “Call me Nata” by Georgian transgender activists Nata Talikishvili at Klara. The Tbilisi international symposium ended with a record release event of Istanbul-based transgender artist Banu by Berlin-based TransSoundScapes at club Horoom.

## **Local learnings**

The conference part of the Tbilisi symposium consisted of two full days of presentations and discussions, in English on October 14th and in Georgian, on the 16th. International speakers came from Berlin, Amsterdam, Silandro, Bolzano, Innsbruck, Istanbul and Baku; local actors joined in from Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, Batumi and the region of Racha.

The English language part of the conference focused on the Next Generation of Cultural Spaces and two different cultural centres were showcased from Tbilisi and Silandro. The conference summarised the NGOCS project and discussed a wide range of issues through panel discussions. The Georgian language portion was fully dedicated to local cultural entities, with particular emphasis given to the representatives of non-profit and non-dominant cultural sectors. It was also very well attended where all four largest Georgian cities participated.



On October 15, David Lezhava (ACT4culture) and Dimitri Hegemann (Tresor Foundation) travelled to Rustavi city (250,000 population), situated within 20 kilometres from the capital Tbilisi. The intention was to visit, inspect and document (a short video was filmed) a historic building and adjacent land for a possible future development of The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces in Rustavi, Georgia. They were met by a local government representative and a private owner of the property.

This particular site has great potential to be converted into NGOCS. We believe such possible future transformation would hugely contribute to the development and promotion of Rustavi city by enhancing the quality of life, creating new jobs and retaining youngsters of the cultural sector from migrating. Culture has proved numerous times that it can re-activate decayed industrial zones of inner cities, breathing new life into the unused infrastructures and factories.

However, the location was sold at an auction by the city a couple of years ago and currently is in private ownership. Because of this, it is quite complicated as a stable economic and legal structure needs to be established with the property owner to ensure long-term perspective and autonomy. In parallel, the discussion must take place with the City Hall to examine the extent of the city's contribution.

We have agreed with the parties to continue the discussion from spring 2023.

### 3.2.4 Local recommendations Tbilisi

**The following actions are recommended to support the development of independent cultural spaces in Tbilisi and Georgia:**

- Identifying and mobilising/self-mobilising the initial groups/grassroots communities;
- Providing the model and overall information/examples on how the existing independent cultural spaces work;
- Identifying funding possibilities, specifically from local communities and international organisations. Considering the political system in the region, there's little to zero expectation that the central government or municipalities would fund such initiatives. Somehow, it's even possible that in some cases, state institutions would see a danger in independent, uncontrolled cultural groups;

- Providing training, information, knowledge and experience, which allows such groups to identify problems and come up with solutions by themselves without outside interventions and without defining their agenda from 'above' (Which quite frequently happens especially when big international organisations provide financial support) - people know what they need most;
- Providing knowledge about creating self-sustainable financial models.

We believe the translocal alliance is vital, especially for the Caucasus region. Knowledge and experience sharing - the process of exchanging information between individuals, collectives and organisations, is of utmost importance. Another important added value in the translocal alliance is the significance of networking, finding like-minded individuals and organisations in Europe and working with them.

Our participation in the NGOCS project and the months of its implementation, conferences and community calls gave us significant knowledge on how cultural spaces could be created and operated in different cultural, political and geographical contexts. The experiences from BASIS South Tyrol, Tresor Foundation Berlin and our own House of ReCONNEXTion from Tbilisi have already left a mark on the cities. The impact of such spaces has been already tested on various scales. The summarising document has been prepared and we think the most valuable continuation of the NGOCS project could be to work on a particular place/space guided by the created document.

### ■ 3.3 BASIS Vinschgau Venosta / South Tyrol, Italy

BASIS Vinschgau Venosta joined the NGOCS project halfway through. It represents a strong cultural space that has managed to establish a long-term private-public partnership. Its sustainability and long-term security is an inspiring example for other spaces and initiatives in Southern and Eastern Europe.

#### 3.3.1 Local cultural context South Tyrol

South Tyrol is a mostly rural border-province in the Alps of Northern Italy with a population of 530.000. It is a culturally and linguistically mixed area, with three distinct language groups.

#### Socio-political context

By GDP per capita South Tyrol is the richest province in Italy and one of the richest in Europe. This level of prosperity has enabled a large portion of youth to leave the province to study and/or work abroad. For years local governments pushed and financed high education programs for young people – even in the cultural sector-, though without creating the structural possibilities to put this expertise at use in their home region.

This has led to a significant brain drain over the last two decades, which has slowed down the growth and development of the entire cultural sector. There is a small number of highly educated people, who mostly studied abroad, returning or being willing to return to South Tyrol and put their knowledge to



use for society. On the other side there are still some cultural collectives that try to promote free and non dominant cultural spaces in their own little rural areas, facing tough political and financial risks by themselves.

The Creative Industries (CI) in general are politically very underrepresented, with representatives of other established industries, like tourism and agriculture, making up most of elected politicians. Financial support for cultural actors and spaces can come from different public sources. Municipality level, provincial level or for bigger projects National- or European funds.

### **Availability of space**

Due to the mountainous terrain of South Tyrol, free and usable spaces are a very limited resource. Combined with the median wealth and a general lack of houses, the opening of cultural spaces is oftentimes financially risky. This is especially true for venues dedicated to sub-culture and non-dominant culture. Cooperation between existing cultural spaces and collectives/cultural actors is oftentimes the only way for individuals to perform.

### **BASIS Vinschgau Venosta**

In some cases, like BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, there is a PPP (private-public-partnership) in place. Meaning that f.e. the property owner is public, but the space is managed by a private entity. In that case, the municipality lacked the competencies to create a project like BASIS and created a partnership with Hannes Götsch, a single expert who had a background in cultural scene management abroad and in the region.

## **The next generation of cultural spaces**

The next generation of cultural spaces will most likely propose a diversification of formats and collaborations, not only concerning the contents but also the incomes and sectors, for example involving forms of cultural tourism and local business stakeholders. South Tyrol is not big enough for the establishment of many big spaces and projects on its territory, so the connection between different spaces, locations, players and economic branches assumes a key step for further development of the area. Be it a modular PPP project of work and culture in a re-used barrack like BASIS, clubs, youth centres, a museum or events in public spaces like alpine meadows. The way forward is to embrace and facilitate individual spaces and foster shared diversity through cooperation and collaboration.

### **3.3.2 Case study: BASIS Vinschgau Venosta**

Statistics

<b>Location</b>	Former fascist barracks "Caserma Druso" in Silandro, Venosta Valley in South Tyrol
<b>Founding Date</b>	2019/2020
<b>Main function</b>	Economy (Workspaces, Consulting), education, socio-cultural life
<b>Size</b>	2.300 square metres
<b>Number of Employees</b>	7 between full-time and part-time & 10 external contributors
<b>Yearly revenue</b>	Growing year by year since the opening in 2020. In the year 2022 BASIS had a revenue of approx. 240.000€.

### **Introduction**

BASIS Vinschgau Venosta is a social activation hub grass root prototype in Venosta valley, South Tyrol, North Italy. It is located in the former fascist barracks "Caserma Druso" built between 1937 and '42 in Silandro, the main urban village in the middle of the valley on 720m sea level. It is a valley of about 70 km length counting about 35.000 people located south of the main alpine ridge below the Austrian and the Swiss border. Europe wise it lies quite centrally but at the other hand very remote in terms of logistics and urbanisation.

The historical poverty of the valley fostered a strong competence in the creative industries as crafts, hand-crafts, artistic competence, architecture, design and music. Due to the intensive agricultural land prices raised to city ring levels and, along with the high living costs (+20% compared to Austria and southern Germany) this led to emigration of people. The valley suffers stagnation, brain drain, lack of academics and a heavy value decay.



BASIS Vinschgau Venosta  
Image by Elisa Cappellari

BASIS was created as a counterweight to these trends and brings economy, education and socio-cultural life under one roof in a 4th sector prototype. By working at the interface between modern economy, informal education, contemporary art and socio-cultural development, BASIS aims to support traditions and transfer global trends in order to unfold creative potential as well as create and foster existing companies and start-up initiatives from all sectors. The constructive climate wants to encourage experimentation, strengthen individual responsibility and enable dynamic and resilient growth.

BASIS is trying to use and expand the existing knowledge through local, European, and international cooperation and networking in order to rethink regional development.

## **History**

The idea for the project started in 2012 with a participatory process on the future of Silandro. Part of that discussion was the future use of the barracks as well, which at that time were about to be transferred from the province to the municipality. In 2015 Hannes Götsch started the first substantial talks with the administration of Silandro on the establishment of a “Social Activation Hub” in the Druso barracks. These talks led to writing a project for the European Structural Fund (ERDF) called ‘1053 BASIS’ - Periphery Innovation Service in 2016 and its approval in 2017.

The needed renovations were done functionally, meaning no needless splashing around with money, but rather looking at the fundamental needs and working with a rational mindset. The hardware, meaning the structure itself, was financed from municipal funds, the software, meaning the creation of the project itself, was financed through ERDF. The Event Space “KASINO” was financed by the province. The renovation works were finished in 2019 and saw the opening of the first modules of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta. Among them was the Co-Working Space, event space, seminar rooms and maisonette apartments.

The official launch of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta coincided almost directly with the Covid 19 pandemic of 2020. That situation hindered large parts of the core business model of BASIS. The event space KA-

SINO had to adhere to the public restriction at the time and the residency of European and international guests became more difficult. Yet, the services which BASIS could provide, had a big impact on the individual experience of the Co-Workers and visitors. Through the generous layout, the modular Co-Working space could stay open and gave its users a possibility to continue their work and gave them space for at least limited social interactions.

Even though the first two years were dominated by the pandemic, the project kept on growing and the module KREATIVWERKSTATT was opened in 2020. This additional project is located in another one of the 4 main buildings of the Druso barracks and provides affordable studios for artists, artisans and craft-people. Starting with one floor in 2020 it has been enlarged by 2 additional floors in the following years. Especially after the creation of an additional temporary exhibition space in the same building, a thriving local microcosm of visual arts has developed.

Through another ERDF project, called VERDE, BASIS established a multifunctional kitchen (Culinary Craft Academy CCA) and a creative studio (Creative Education Studio CES). These additions were finished in 2022 and give space for research, production and refinement of food in the CCA and the CES allow Filmmakers, photographers, musicians, game designers and artists to develop and test new products.

## **Structure**

In the dialogue between the organising team of the BASIS project, the municipality of Silandro and the province it was decided to create the association “BASIS Vinschgau Venosta” as the legal entity for the pro-

ject. BASIS Vinschgau Venosta is run as a recognized non-profit association for Transdisciplinary Promotion and Education in Economy, Culture and Social Affairs.

Currently the most important external stakeholder is the municipality of Silandro, as it is the owner of the structure. The association is renting the structure and the public funding of the municipality as well as the provincial funds get funnelled to the association through the municipality. At its core the BASIS Vinschgau Venosta project is therefore a Private-Public-Partnership (PPP), with BASIS curating the project mostly independently. The main project of BASIS, meaning the principal space in the Palazzina Servizi with its Co-Working Space, educational spaces and KASINO is rather safe for the coming years. The contract foresees the usage of the space by the association until 2052, but it needs to be agreed upon every 9 years by the municipal council. The municipal funding needed a yearly decision so far.

The stakeholder management with the municipality, the province and other local stakeholders has to be seen through the lens of the political-ideological mainstream in the valley. As a mostly rural area the predominant values can be considered as conservative, whilst the approach of BASIS is on the progressive side. This contrast can at times be quite challenging to manage and complicates the communication towards the political stakeholders and the local population in general. BASIS has therefore put a lot of emphasis in its employment investment to better the local communication and stakeholder management. This is not only a strategic decision, but rather one born by conviction, as the project wants to have a positive impact for the town and the valley. This can

only be achieved, if the population is not only standing behind the project, but rather believes in it.

### **Organisation**

The internal organisational structure is broadly divided in three groups, which work in cohesion with each other. Firstly, the elected board of the association, consisting of 7 individuals with diverse backgrounds and two languages. They decide the strategy and priorities of the project.

The operational part is handled by the BASIS Team, consisting of 7 internal employees and around 10 external contributors. The Team is running the day-to-day business of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, meaning organisation, administration and communication of the different modules, events and business units.

The third group consists of volunteers, either members of the association, Co-Workers, resident artists or people who generally support the project without any direct involvement.

### **Community**

One of the most challenging parts of running a project like BASIS Vinschgau Venosta is the definition of specific target groups due to its diverse offer. There is not a single target group, but each module, service or business unit caters to overlapping groups. F.e. the Culinary Craft Academy is a kitchen for experimental research, production and refinement. The KASINO is open for sub-culture events, panel discussions, theatre and everything in between. The communication towards the community is therefore never only targeted to a specific group of people, but rather spread

broadly and seeks to create individual engagement.

BASIS Vinschgau Venosta sees its role in consulting and providing tools and spaces for individual creativity. Especially an open space to create is very limited in the valley. Through that outreach and enabling culture the community of BASIS is very active and often contributes independently to the further development of the project.

### **Income and expenses**

The biggest expense of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta is by far the personnel costs, including the services of external contributors. These expenses amount to around 50% of the total costs. Another large portion, around 25% is taken up by the rent of the structure itself, with 10% being added by energy costs.

The largest income stream is public funding from different sources. They cover about 50% of the costs. Renting out the spaces and workspaces in the Co-Working and the KREATIVWERKSTATT adds another 30%. The last 20% are made through the curated program, meaning events, workshops etc.

### **Local impact**

The impact of the BASIS Vinschgau Venosta project can be seen from different sides, due to the diverse fields in which it operates. There is the economic impact of giving space and consultation to businesses, freelancers, and artists. There is the educational impact of providing a structure for different education formats. These impacts alone go a long way in revitalising and strengthening the village and the valley.



Yet, the impact which cannot be understated is the socio-cultural impact of the event space “KASINO”. From the beginning the implementation of a multi-functional event space was seen as an integral part of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta.

Today the KASINO works as a conference and exhibition hall, theatre, live venue, cinema, club and everything in between. In the musical focus, the main idea was to establish a venue, which works half like a studio situation for getting a realistic master response for producers. So that in-home studio productions can be tested on real live conditions, avant-garde room acoustics and an excellent sound system. Nearby a connected education studio for music and foto/film production has been developed. The aim is to bring “underground subculture” to the “middle ground”, to strengthen their capabilities and visibility, connect them to the real market and create new business fields. Creative industries represent an innovative approach to rethink classic economy toward the creation of new economic circuits such as circular and green economy.

Content wise the aim of KASINO is to run it as an innovative exchange platform for any kind of avant-garde world culture and fill the niche, which had no space in the valley before. Through already existing connections to the sub-culture network of Europe BASIS could provide a program with high profile musicians, DJ’s and artists. The organisation of experimental and non-dominant music events is an attempt to push the cultural scene of the Venosta Valley and South Tyrol forwards.

### 3.3.3 Conference South Tyrol

#### Location & date

BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, Silandro, South Tyrol, Italy. 22-24/09/2022

#### Program & participants

Saturday, 24 <sup>th</sup> of September	
16:00	<b>Opening of Symposium</b> Presenters: Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency) & Hannes Götsch (BASIS Vinschgau Venosta)
16:15	<b>The Next Generation of Cultural Space: BASIS</b> Presenter: Hannes Götsch (BASIS Vinschgau Venosta)
17:00	Next Generation of Cultural Space: Bassiani & ReconNEXTion Presenters: Naja Orashvili (Bassiani, Tbilisi), Giorgi Kikinoshvili (Horoom, ReconNEXTion, Tbilisi), David Lezhava (ACT4culture, Georgia)
18:30	<b>Tresor Foundation</b> Presenter: Dimitri Hegemann (Tresor Foundation, Berlin)
19:15	<b>Enabling the Next Generation of Cultural Spaces in South Tyrol</b> Moderator: Brigitta Villaronga Walker & Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency) Panellists: Bart van der Heide (Director of Museion, Bolzano), Georgina Mendoza (Radbar management, DJ, Mexico/Berlin/South Tyrol), Dimitri Hegemann (Tresor Foundation, Berlin), Sarah Trevisiol (Anthropologist, director of Women’s Museum, Meran), David Lezhava (ACT4culture, Georgia), Hannes Götsch (CVO, BASIS Vinschgau Venosta), Luca Bizzarri (Italian culture, bilingualism and foreign languages, Cultural department Bolzano), Daniela Oberhofer Tonkovic (Magic Carpet, Openspace IBK, Innsbruck)
21:00	<b>Dance of Urgency</b> Presenter: Bogomir Doring (Amsterdam)
22:00	<b>Musical performances</b> Artists: Lady Six Sky, Davide Piras, Falak, Arcangelo, Youdiditagain

## Summary of activities

### Thursday the 22nd of September

The consortium visited a number of abandoned and temporary off-grid historical spaces. After a visit to the old military area of Traoi, we heard amazing anecdotes from a club owner who has run this place for almost 50 years. He is now retiring and discussing a new purpose for his club Ladum. Following that, we went to Bunker 23. An unusual place that has been closed for years, but with a lot of promise for cultural repurposing for non-dominant youth culture in the region. During our tour we reimagined cultural usage of the space, as well as difficulties and opportunities that may impact the route to realising these usages.



### Friday the 23rd of September

On Friday, the exploration began in Meran with a visit to the future Ost West Club, which was under construction at the time. Outside of the venue local cultural activists spoke about their membership model and the problematic local social-political background, such as the divide between German and Italian-speaking inhabitants and the region's lack of support for non-dominant youth culture. Afterwards they brought us to the old location of the club.

We visited the former pilgrims' hospice St. Florian in Neumarkt. Together with the organisers of the annual Hospiz festival, an interdisciplinary cultural festival taking place in the hospice, we reimagined the space for non-dominant cultural usage. The historical location has been renovated by the municipality, who is the owner of the site. However, a cultural vision seems to be lacking, with usage being mostly commercial rentals that are not embedded in the local cultural context.

The day ended with a visit to the former Attract space. Once a beacon of underground music culture, but now closed due to an uncooperative owner.

### Saturday the 24th of September

The Saturday seminar was designed to explore obstacles and opportunities for enabling the next generation of cultural spaces in South Tyrol. The main program began with presentations from Berlin, Tbilisi, and South Tyrol that showcased each partner's local settings, filled with learnings and methods gained during the process of obtaining local venues. Following the lectures, an interdisciplinary panel discussion with representatives from non-dominant youth & queer culture, and cultural institutions took place.



## Local learnings

The conference broadened the view of local actors to challenges and solutions from spaces in other countries and regions. Through that confrontation one has to re-think the local situation, which has become normal. South Tyrol's investment in culture comes almost exclusively from public funds or large foundations. There is very little private investment in cultural hubs or forward thinking projects.

Comparing that situation to spaces in Georgia, where it is nearly impossible to work together with the governments and financing has to come from private investment, a large contrast appears. None of these situations are ideal, yet the confrontation with a completely different approach enhances one's capability of rethinking and eventually redesigning one's own approach.

In the end the best approach is probably a mixture between the two systems. Public funding for spaces is not only financially important, but also creates a sense of working towards the public good. At the same time, private investment limits the power and decreases the bureaucracy that is usually connected to working with public institutions.

The sentiment that emerged from the conference was the wish to continue to enable and empower creative people to do their own thing. This rings especially true for young people, who are seeking a space in which they can express themselves and actually have an impact. These experiences install a feeling of self-efficacy which is crucial for their personal and professional development.

Another thing which became evermore apparent during the conference is the importance of security

in long-term planning. Ownership, or at least a long-term contract of a space, allows for a more experimental approach. An organising team needs the security of space to be able to think about- and work towards the long term cultural impact of the space, rather than immediate survival.

## Summarised

- Creating network moments together is very important for lobbying and gaining financial support to enable the next generation of cultural spaces.
- The next generation of cultural spaces should be interdisciplinary spaces where nature and the human need are in the focus.
- There needs to be a change of paradigms, connecting interdisciplinary work, music, arts, and non-dominant groups
- We should think of culture and space as a crossover approach
- We need to learn how to relate to each other again, through the instrument of culture

## Statements by participants

*"There is a tremendous vacuum here, there are basically no young people in the region. But this is an opportunity for South Tyrol to progress; you need some foreign examples to know what to do and what not to do."*

**Georgina Mendoza, Lady Six Sky**

*"These network-building and highlight moments are critical. If we are talking about the future generation of cultural spaces, I believe they should be interdisciplinary spaces that focus on nature and human needs. So we're talking about clever and sensitive innovation, where we respond to local needs rather than construction hubs where buying and selling is always first."*

**Hannes Götsch, BASIS Vinschgau Venosta**

*"I want to really voice the importance of the network that is being created here, getting all the actors together. It's about lobbying, it's about financial support, it's about bringing the narrative out of isolation. You might attack one of us, but if you do, you attack all of us. So this network can also serve as a coalition."*

**Bart van der Heide, Museion, Bolzano**

*"We really need to strive to integrate the culture with the economical and social life. It's the current trend, and the world is speaking a different language. We need administrators with a long-term horizon to focus on innovative bureaucracy."*

**Hannes Götsch, BASIS Vinschgau Venosta**

*"What we have to do inside the public administration of South Tyrol first of all: Establishing a common language, we have to admit that there's a new idea of culture that we can place into the public administration. The administration frequently has a vision of culture as something from the 1980s, despite the fact that it is changing rapidly."*

**Luca Bizzarri, Department of Italian culture, bilingualism and foreign languages**

*"Culture defines the style of how we speak and relate to each other. I thought we might be in a scenario where we stopped actually talking and listening to each other, where there is also a crisis of meaning. All of this cultural and social stuff is a method to communicate with each other, so let's start learning how to interact with each other again through the medium of culture. That is the next generation of cultural spaces."*

**Philipp Kieser, Culture Assault**

*"Culture can be used as a cross-over approach according to UNESCO. So if we think of space and culture as a crossover: how can culture influence the shaping of different spaces? We come to the point of finding a common language between the private and public sector and also inside the public sector."*

**Luca Bizzarri, Department of Italian culture, bilingualism and foreign languages**

*"What struck me the most after the exchange in South Tyrol was the urgent need for a new cultural narrative that accepts non-dominant youth culture as an integral component of culture. Under-represented groups, such as the queer community, have limited access to safe(r) venues and frequently flee South Tyrol to find them elsewhere. The conference inspired a deep conversation about the importance of community care, collaboration, and mental health: we may infer that there are spaces to be*

*re-imagined and re-used, but to obtain them and sustainably run them, requires a strong connected cultural creative community, a cultural mycelium."*

**Liese Kingma, Space of Urgency**

*"I believe that in South Tyrol we need to improve the collective consciousness between different realities and stakeholders. Meeting with international players was a first step for exchanging best practices and good strategies between different European spaces, but also for bringing together different local cultural collectives, develop common goals and collaborative strategies to improve visibility for non-dominant culture in the public space and therefore have a larger social, political and economic impact on the region. Only together can we really make a local change about the concept of culture itself."*

**Sarah Trevisiol, Women's Museum, Meran**



*“To capitalise on the enthusiasm generated during the conference, a series of ‘Break the Silos’ events were organised. The events pave the way forward to establish an integrated structure for the region’s next generation of culture, inviting dignitaries such as the city mayor and international representatives from the night time economy and culture. This continuation beyond the scope of the NGOCS project emphasises the impact that conferences and symposia can have. Having an international alliance touch down and bridge translocal best practices in South Tyrol resulted in trust amongst interdisciplinary stakeholders and community self-organisation. I have the hope that the NGOCS alliance can contribute to the construction of a new cultural narrative for culture, ones that nurture the future generation(s) of culture in a variety of socio-political contexts.”*

**Liese Kingma, Space of Urgency**

*“Having institutions like Museion that are open to involve non dominant culture, helps to make the society understand that the concept of culture itself is never an objective perspective but also follows political and economic agendas. Opening up in that sense means that there could be a new diversification of culture, a more inclusive perspective with a wider horizontal support and organisation, that could even attract new forms of cultural tourism and business investments, for the benefit of the entire area.”*

**Sarah Trevisiol, Women’s Museum, Meran**



NGOCS South Tyrol conference  
Image by Marco Telfser

### 3.3.4 Local recommendations South Tyrol

The South Tyrolean cultural scene is already growing through new actors, be that former expats, young talent coming through and an influx in international cultural actors. Yet, the scene is mostly working alone and a proper network of collaboration and cooperation is not established enough.

A translocal alliance can help shed a light on this emerging Creative Industry of non-dominant culture and show lawmakers, public officials and the population in general, that culture is not only important for a healthy society, but rather an economic field in itself.

The series of conferences has been very fruitful for knowledge exchange, networking and the build up of a translocal alliance. But should the NGOCS project continue, the South Tyrolean approach would be to work on concrete projects. To do so would need an increased amount of funding, since the NGOCS Conferences showed the importance of ownership in the establishment of cultural spaces. Just talking about a project is not enough, there would have to be a plan in place to actually try to acquire a space, wherever it may be. Otherwise the project would only be a short term thinking or planning process, without actually providing the basis for a long term strategy in building up a cultural space.

This increased need of funding would also mean a restructuring of the project partners. South Tyrol was happy with its partners in the alliance, but the funding would need to be increased to a larger amount, as the current project funding was able to provide.

### ■ 3.4 Envisioning Free Space conferences

Since 2016 Space of Urgency has organised the Berlin based Frei(T)räume / Envisioning Free Space conference. The annual event is co-organised with Dance of Urgency, as part of the Nights: Stadt Nach Acht conference.

Envisioning Free Space envisions a future where cultural spaces and their creative ecosystems are self-reliant, finding ways to deal with the growing threats authoritarian governments, neo-liberalism and war pose. Over the years it has united a vast network of artists, activists, urban changemakers, scientists and political agents, creating a space for interdisciplinary collaboration to drive policy change.

The NGOCS project was launched at Envisioning Free Space in November 2021 in Berlin, with a public panel discussion of the project partners. During the 2022 edition in Amsterdam, another panel discussion and presentation of the project's results functioned as public project closing.



### 3.4.1 Frei(T)räume / Envisioning Free Space 2021

#### Location & date

Oyoun, Berlin, 27.11.2021

#### Program & participants

**The NGOCS program consisted of a panel discussion on the main conference stage with;**

Danaja Volk (United we Stream, Berlin), David Lezhava (Act4Culture Georgia, Tbilisi), Giorgi Kikonishvili (Bassiani / Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi), Lejna Čelebičić & Mersel Bujak (Neocor, Sarajevo), Dimitri Hegemann (Tresor Foundation, Berlin)

#### Summary of activities

The panel discussion 'ECF: Rave-olution from East to West' aimed to showcase the NGOCS project setup and its project partners, with a focus on the main space that could serve as lighthouse and blueprint, the 'Hotel Igman' in Sarajevo.





## Local learnings

The panel discussion created awareness among the 350 attendees of the conference, followed by an on-line presence. The main objective was to present the members of the NGOCS project consortium from Tbilisi, Sarajevo and Berlin.

### **Learnings from the panel discussion are:**

- An international focus on Southern & Eastern Europe is needed.
- We need international alliances to promote and showcase the potential of night- and clubculture.
- Ownership of the venue is a must for sustainably operating and running a space.
- The next generation of cultural spaces will have a social-cultural impact beyond the venue itself, influencing its city, country and region in total.

# Statements by participants



*with never ending business ideas. Our industries are undervalued, underfunded, and underappreciated. It's time for us to join together the state, our scale and our might."*

**David Lezhava, Act4Culture Georgia, Tbilisi**

*"What I feel is that a structure like Igman may benefit the people of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Balkans. I am persuaded that the venue (in this case, the club) sets the tone for the rest. We have to start from scratch, which is why we must own it in order to have it in the future. I believe the space can assist to integrate diverse ethnic groups by teaching them a new method to dance together. The place becomes a house of peace, a model, and I believe the UN should promote such a model."*

**Dimitri Hegemann, Tresor Foundation, Berlin**

*"There are many buildings in Bosnia destroyed during the war, the last thing we want is to have a war narrative. We are ready to have a different life. By giving the building new life, we give new life to the community itself."*

**Lejna Čelebičić, Neocor, Sarajevo**

*"Yes, we have many historical spaces, many of those buildings have a very specific and strong soul. We plan to find one that suits our needs the most. The creatives and the cultural entities have to stand united. There are more things that unite us than divide us, so I believe this project in the long run will work!"*

**David Lezhava, Act4Culture Georgia, Tbilisi**

*"When you come to Berlin you can clearly see that there are very different frameworks in place. Here there is recognition for night culture as being part of culture. We need to empower this narrative. Now it's time to take steps together and find investors for Igman."*

**Dimitri Hegemann, Tresor Foundation, Berlin**

*"There is no strategic presence of the spaces, The local political context results in people not having any trust that things can change. There are now predictions that next year 35.000 young people will leave the country."*

**Mersel Bujak, Necor, Sarajevo**

*"Now during the pandemic all the safer spaces are closed. Those spaces are beacons of safety for the non dominant youth culture, these interactions stopped. Social structures are now disintegrated. With this the face of modern culture disappeared in Georgia."*

**Giorgi Kikonisvili, Bassiani / Creative Collective**

**Spectrum, Tbilisi**

*"I think a crucial point is the ownership of the asset/ space; we believe we have to run and administer the company so we don't have to be dependent on the landlord, gentrification or new investors popping up*

### 3.4.2 Envisioning Free Space 2022

#### Location & date

De School, Amsterdam. Saturday 26 November 2022

#### Program & participants

**The 2022 program is a main stage panel discussion, bridging the project topics to the local context in Amsterdam. Participants are:**

Liese Kingma (Space of Urgency, Berlin), David Lezhava (Act4culture Georgia, Tbilisi), Giorgi Kikonishvili (Bassiani / Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi), Naja Orashvili (Bassiani / Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi), Hannes Götsch (BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, Silandro) and Philipp Kieser (Culture Assault, Bolzano)

#### Summary of activities

The panel discussion will focus on the NGOCS project's current situation as well as the local contexts of Basis Vinschgau Venosta in Italy and House of ReconNEXTion in Tbilisi.

Unlike the Envisioning Free Space Conference in 2021, both project partners discussed their local difficulties and opportunities, as well as the local implications of the NGOCS project.

#### Local learnings

- Unlike Amsterdam and Berlin, South Tyrol and Georgia lack outstanding spaces layered with various business strategies as examples.
- As a result, in order to achieve a compromise and free up space, you must be more adaptive to your surroundings.
- NGOCS has helped to put the importance of enabling independent cultural spaces on the table, and the collaboration must continue.
- The next generation of cultural places should bring together an interdisciplinary cultural crowd from many fields.
- Having a political goal and a strong community from the outset boosts a space's resilience in difficult times.



## Statements by participants

*"There was a really sadistic, patriarchal vibe here as I was trying to get the space. In South Tyrol, we don't have diverse venues like you do in Amsterdam. Because we were one-of-a-kind, we needed to make the local environment understand how we worked. Keeping the demands of the local economy in mind, we developed a 4th sector prototype that included municipal needs."*

**Hannes Götsch, BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, Silandro**

*"The young people of South Tyrol are fleeing, whilst you have nature and excellent quality of life. Therefore what we do is to stay and make sure that the right wing populist parties are not entirely trashing this region. We are now attempting to develop an action plan using international assistance and partnerships provided by NGOCS. We can establish a more open and impactful agenda with the support of non-governmental organisations."*

**Philipp Kieser, Culture Assault, Bolzano**

*"There is no interdisciplinary collaboration in Eastern Europe with a municipality that assists us. There is no such concept as a 'free space'. It has been a hard endeavour for us, we had to turn to the commercial markets. Because there is no backing from local administrations."*

**David Lezhava, Act4culture Georgia, Tbilisi**

*"Bassiani began with the idea of becoming a political club. The goal from the start was to bring together persons who were marginalised by society. It would be a meeting spot for folks looking for new friends. The gay community is the space's primary*

driving force. The dancefloors became a meeting point of the people that never meet in the daytime. Right now if you go to Tbilisi, it's full of queer nights in the bars or clubs. Being together and defending together became so important it influenced the whole community."

**Giorgi Kikonishvili, Bassiani, Creative Collective Spectrum, Tbilisi**

### ■ 3.5 Community calls

The community calls are virtual meetings where participants join in a moderated discussion to tackle topics related to obtaining and sustaining independent spaces for non-dominant culture. Organised by Space of Urgency, the community calls aim to ignite a translocal activist alliance between Berlin, Tbilisi, Sarajevo, South Tyrol and many other spaces and communities from Southern & Eastern Europe. Most of the attendees of the community calls are involved in independent spaces for non-dominant culture in Southern and Eastern Europe. The calls are broadcasted online by United we Stream.

The three calls are organised around key subjects related to the project's theme. They support knowledge exchange, serve a motivational purpose by bringing like-minded people together facing similar challenges within their local environments, and build relationships that lay the foundation for the continuation of the translocal network.



### Structure

#### The 2 hour long calls follow the following structure

- Introduction round: Short introduction of all the participants
- Presentations: 2 presentations of practical experts in the call's topic + Q&A
- Group work: The participants give their answers to the main questions. Miro board is used for documentation
- Discussion: Moderated group discussion where participants can clarify their answers and react on each other
- Closing: Closing, room for comments and announcement of next call

After the calls a summary is sent around to the participants via email.

### Topics

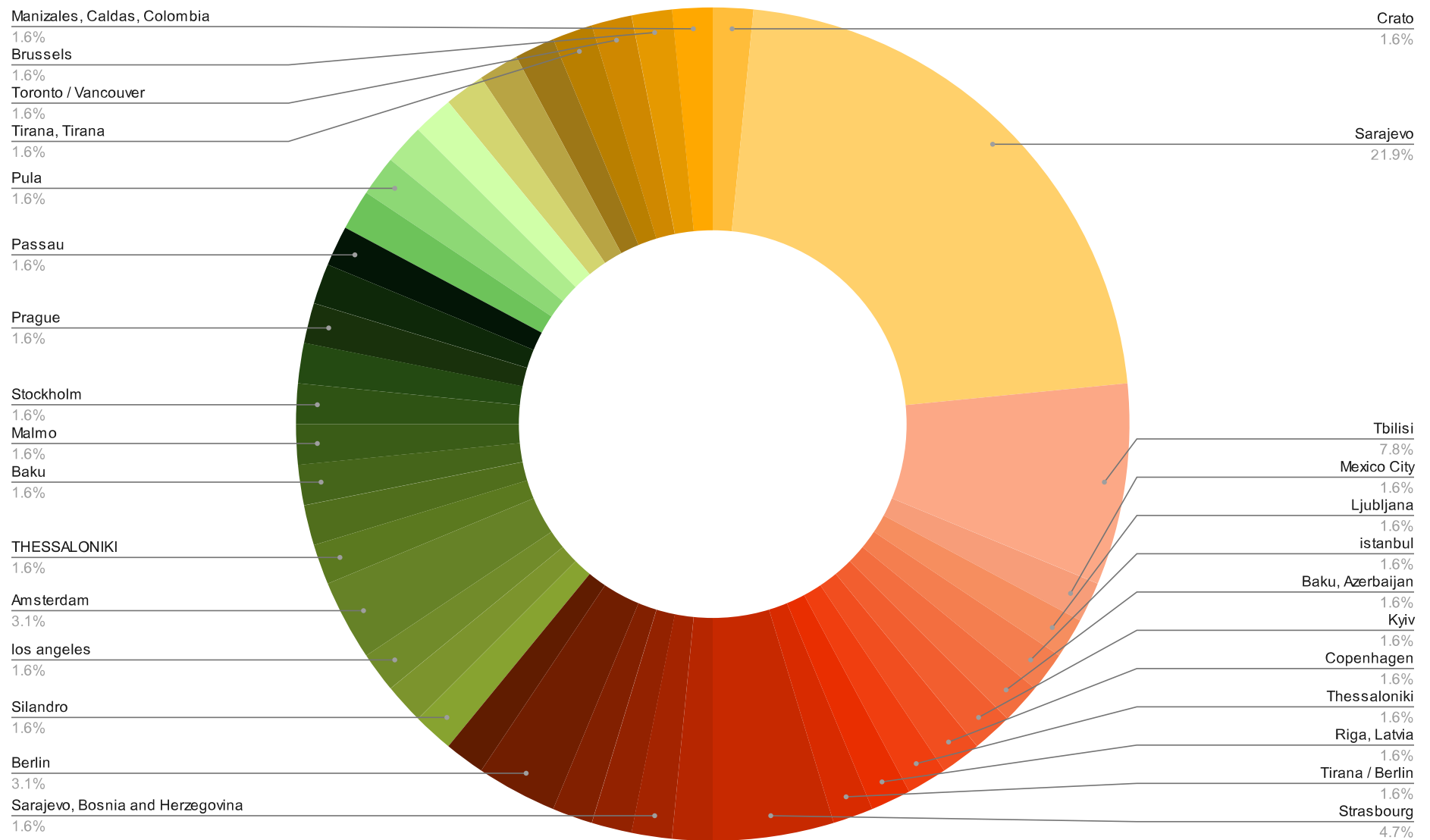
The community calls revolve around important project themes. The emphasis of the calls is on getting to know each other and to share experiences. The broader themes we explore are the external environment of the spaces, their internal models and how the spaces can be supported by a translocal alliance.

Community call #1	External: Stakeholders & stakeholder engagement
Community call #2	Internal: Models for running a space
Community call #3	International: Support by a translocal network

### Participants

Most of the participants of the community calls are involved in independent spaces for non-dominant culture in Southern and Eastern Europe. Some of the participants come from spaces from other parts of Europe or the world, some are involved in NGOs, advocacy and network organisations, are doing research, or are otherwise related to the topic. A total of 64 individual registration forms have been filled in, with many returning participants and several additional participants that have not filled in the registration form. Diagram 3 shows the wide variety of cities the community call participants come from.

**Diagram 3:** Community calls, participating cities



## **Content of the calls**

### **Community call #1**

In the first call we discussed which actors in our environment influence our spaces and what our relationships are with them. Such external stakeholders include visitors, funders, sponsors, real estate owners, local and national governments or the police. The first call served an introductory purpose and therefore we learned about each other's context and how we are dealing with this.

#### **We asked ourselves the following questions:**

- Which external stakeholders are the most relevant for you in the process of obtaining and running your independent cultural space?
- What were the biggest challenges you encounter in dealing with these stakeholders?
- Which strategies/approaches that you tried did not work to overcome these challenges?
- Which strategies/approaches that you tried did work to overcome these challenges?

Tunel 22 from Sarajevo presented their experiences, after which all spaces shared theirs. It took them 19 years to "get it right". Eventually a combination of addressing the right people in the government and using lobbying by other cultural institutions in the right moments, led to success in obtaining an independent cultural space. Other spaces shared their experiences on topics such as dealing with corrupt authorities, scarcity of space in gentrifying cities, resistance from traditional society, narco violence and using international attention to get local recognition.

All spaces are dealing with obstacles and difficult situations locally. Speaking as a group, we did realise there are gradations in this. There is for example a big difference in risking an event being stopped by the police or having bureaucratic struggles, and having right-wing groups attacking your space or narcotic gangs overtaking your event. The discussion helps the participants to widen their perspectives and increases solidarity.

### **Community call #2**

In the second call we discussed the internal models we apply in running our spaces and initiatives. A special focus is on the financial stability, or the business models. As a non-profit and non-mainstream space it is often hard to create a financially stable organisation. In the call we aimed to exchange on the different income streams spaces rely on and how these streams are related to internal values and external factors.

#### **We ask ourselves:**

- Which different income streams does your space have?
- How are these income streams connected to the principles and values of your space?
- How are these income streams connected to the activities you organise in your space?
- How are these income streams related to the external conditions that your space is dealing with?

House of ReconNEXTion and BASIS presented their economic models, which are extensively described in the 'case studies' section of this publication. The oth-

er participating spaces shared what different kinds of income streams they rely on, such as grants, ticket and bar sales, corporate events, development funds or personal investment.

They share how these income streams are decided upon, in coherence with the internal values and principles of space, and working within the conditions of their external environment and society. Some are for example against hosting corporate events or accepting commercial sponsorship, while spaces in countries with less funding opportunities and visitors with lower budgets say it's the only way for them to run the space and be able to realise their values for their communities.

### **Community call #3**

In the third call we took a jump to the future and together visualised how a future translocal alliance for the next generation of cultural spaces looks like. Furthermore we reflected on the topic of sustainability, economically and socially. If we aim to build long-term spaces, these are essential elements to exchange and learn about.

#### **We asked the following questions:**

- How do you try to make your space / initiative more economically sustainable? (give examples)
- And what are good practices for economic sustainability you think need to be scaled up?
- How do you try to make your space / initiative more socially sustainable? (give examples)
- And what are good practices for social sustainability you think need to be scaled up?

- How has a translocal network helped your space / initiative in the past? (give examples)
- And how do you envision a translocal network of the future to look like?

The call started with a presentation of the DIY Space Project from Toronto, Canada. This peer-driven, locally focused and internationally informed project is a direct intervention in support of the preservation and stimulation of self-organised, alternative culture in Toronto. It is a successful example of advocacy work, combined with research and international networking. The DIY Space Project is now getting into the phase of implementing local pilot spaces.

During the call, participants filled in their strategies for sustainability. This ranged from having clear charters, having leaders that reflect the community, support ownership, calculate care work and fair pay, build strong collaborations, be inclusive and respect diversity, and sometimes also to exclude people.

Looking at the translocal alliance, the participants mainly focus on the element of knowledge sharing and connecting with each other. They feel it's important to know what important developments are happening with other spaces, for example through regular update calls or a dedicated online environment. Next to education and sharing knowledge, sharing other resources such as events, artists and programs, applying for shared funding or setting up larger international events are also named as functions of a translocal network. The option for personal connection is valuable, to be able to deepen the exchange on more specific shared topics.

## Learnings

### The following combined learnings come forth out of the three community calls.

- There is a proven interest for continuation of the NGOCS community calls. The over 60 registrations and many returning participants show that there is an interest from the spaces and initiatives to exchange experiences and discuss together.
- Feedback shows that the participants get motivation out of talking with likeminded people that face similar challenges. It reaffirms the idea they are not alone and renews energy to continue their local practices.
- Most of the participants are non-native English speakers. To be inclusive it is important to keep the written and spoken language of the call on a basic level.
- To get the most out of the call, it is important that the calls are set up comprehensively and to-the-point, with well matching presentations and concrete discussion points.
- Participants learn from each other's experiences and good practices - there is a need for sharing resources in a transparent and accessible manner. Other than call summaries, this was not offered during this project.
- The participants express the need to be able to find other participating spaces and initiatives and get in contact personally. Other than a contact list, such a structure was not present during this project.

## Recommendations

### The above learnings lead to the following conclusions.

- Based on the feedback from the participants, there is an incentive to continue the community calls.
- Community calls need to be accessible, well structured and prepared for them to be rewarding to participate in.
- The calls should be accompanied by a digital structure for storing, sharing and accessing resources.
- The calls should be accompanied by a digital network structure to find and contact other participants and members of the alliance.



NGOCS community call  
Image by Space of Urgency



## Statements by participants

*“Even organising large scale events was not enough to prove that we are doing valuable cultural events and we kept being pressured by the police and by society. Only when we started collaborating with international press and projects, we began to receive local recognition.”*

**IN, Baku**

*“We relied solely on connections with various representatives to help us find adequate space. Although excited about our projects, little help came from their side. This changed when we started to prepare presentations as a group, to go to meetings and present together (united in numbers).”*

**DKC, Sarajevo**

*“Our challenge was that there was insignificant cultural interest, there was a negative public opinion about electronic music. By associating our collective with the local community, collaborating with creatives from several expertise and getting involved in exhibitions and workshops rather than events and nightlife, we managed to change this negative perception.”*

**Psydefects, Istanbul**

*“There is general disappointment when working with external stakeholders (the Government). We found the solution with internal stakeholders (sister organisations), most of which are non-profit organisations. As a group we created a shared business*

*model with a shared cash-flow timeline and rented a 3 storey building that houses 7 different collectives and artistic groups.”*

**House of ReconNEXTion, Tbilisi**

*“When it comes to government it was a hit and miss kind of a learning curve, it was difficult to have a strategy with never ending change of officials and political parties climate. But after many years of trying we figured out a “formula” to approach our government. When it comes to lobbying, it took us a long time to obtain an “image” of our cultural scene in order to get the support we got now. A very big emphasis in our process was time, it took us a long time to get it right.”*

**Tunel 22, Sarajevo**

*“Our biggest challenge was our own inflexibility. Now we are exchanging all the time with the stakeholders, adapting the project to daily issues coming up and using reproaches as advantages.”*

**Tiers Lab, Strasbourg**

*“There are no commercial events of our own happening in our space. We only curate the niche. But we give the space to 50% of the total capacity to external players, who can do a small amount of commercial events.”*

**BASIS, Silandro**

*“We balance between openness to collaborate with local politicians, yet have to maintain a certain financial independence to remain resilient.”*

**Somalgors74, Tschlin**

*“Our income streams helped create employment, opportunities for local youth, safe inclusive space for riding sports, street art and activism.”*

**SAMIT, Belgrade**

*“After we found a space we made an open call to volunteers willing to help build our space. By collaborating directly with the audience we would like to engage with and by enjoying the space, the pressure that we felt was alleviated.”*

**DKC, Sarajevo**

*“To become more sustainable we need to scale up SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) strategies and measurement, reporting activities and PR across traditional and digital media.”*

**Avant.Dev, Mexico City**

*“We try to make our workshops free for the asistents. For example in the Festival Internacional de Cine de Riosucio we invite students from a school in an indigenous reserve that had interest in the audiovisual, so they could assist in the workshops.”*

**La Fabrica Terminal, Manizales**

*“Introduce an informal gathering space for the community, where to share thoughts and ideas, build-up with new initiatives and collaborations, deepen ties with each other and create a local/regional network of like-minded people.”*

**ACT4culture, Tbilisi**

*“Support or useful ideas may come unexpectedly. Once we had an interesting exchange with a DJ and founder of a huge event in Ukraine, who provided crucial insights on promoting, while we shared with him our knowledge on bar and fraud management. He called back later to tell us he was very excited with the results.”*

**Sintetik, Baku**

*“A network of this magnitude allows for new partnerships, to stay informed about what is happening in our emerging and non-dominant scenes.”*

**Tiers Lab, Strasbourg**

# 4. OUTCOMES

## ■ 4.1 Introduction

In this section we will summarise the lessons learned from the project, formulate a definition of the next generation of cultural spaces, reflect on our project aims and give recommendations for the future. With these insights we aim to spark new ideas and actions for continuation of the project. We hope they will bring a renewed focus, on a local and international level, in order to pursue the use of underused historical spaces in Eastern & Southern Europe as safe spaces for non-dominant youth culture, queer communities and other marginalised groups.

As an introduction, we will start this section with the general questions of what is needed to support the development of independent cultural spaces, and how this development can be supported by international alliances.

### **What is needed to support the development of independent cultural spaces?**

Independent cultural spaces often face various challenges, including high rents, limited funding, and a lack of political and social recognition. To address these challenges, some of the most needed forms of support for the development of independent cultural spaces include:

- **Affordable spaces:** Providing affordable spaces is essential for the survival of independent cultur-

al spaces. This can be achieved through various means, such as rent control, subsidies, or the repurposing of underutilised public spaces.

- **Financial support:** Independent cultural spaces rely heavily on public funding and private donations to cover their operating costs. Governments, private foundations, and businesses can provide financial support to help sustain these spaces.
- **Legal and political recognition:** Spaces often face legal and political challenges, such as zoning restrictions or a lack of recognition from local authorities. Policies and regulations that recognize the value of these spaces and offer legal protection are essential.
- **Networking and community building:** Creating networks and collaborations among independent cultural spaces and with the local community can help strengthen their collective voice and impact, and increase their visibility and public recognition.
- **Access to resources:** Providing members of cultural spaces with access to resources such as training, mentorship, and equipment can help to develop their skills and capacity and to sustain their operations over time.

In summary, providing affordable spaces, financial support, legal and political recognition, networking and community building, and access to resources are some of the most needed forms of support for the development of independent cultural spaces.

### **How can a translocal alliance support this development?**

A translocal alliance can play a crucial role in supporting the development of independent cultural spaces by bringing together diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources. Some ways in which a translocal alliance can contribute to the development are:

- **Sharing knowledge and expertise:** Bring together individuals and organisations from different parts of the world to share their knowledge and expertise on how to create and sustain independent cultural spaces. This can include sharing best practices on how to secure affordable spaces, access funding, and navigate legal and political challenges.
- **Amplifying the voices:** Help amplify the voice of independent cultural spaces by raising awareness of their work and the challenges they face. This can include organising events and campaigns, creating online platforms to share their stories, and advocating for policies that support their development.



- **Providing financial support:** Pool resources and provide financial support to independent cultural spaces. This can include crowdfunding campaigns, grants, and other forms of financial assistance to help these spaces cover their operational costs and sustain their work over time.
- **Facilitating networking and collaborations:** Facilitate networking and collaborations among independent cultural spaces and with other organisations in different parts of the world. This can help build new partnerships, increase visibility, and create new opportunities for learning and growth.
- **Advocating for policies that support independent cultural spaces:** Advocate for policies that support development at the local, national, and international level. This can include lobbying governments to provide more funding and support for these spaces, and raising awareness of their value and contributions to society.

## ■ 4.2 Project learnings

**The previous sections describe the lessons learned from the separate project elements. Here we will summarise these lessons learned into overall project learnings. The learnings are designed to be applied on a local as well on an international level.**

1. **Narrative & storytelling makes a difference.** The narrative of the next generation of cultural spaces that is developed during this project is important for two reasons.
  - a. The NGOCS narrative can be used to bring local non-dominant cultural initiatives together and increase collaboration towards a shared goal. In this sense, NGOCS can prime the participants for action and enable them to develop a new narrative of the necessity of independent cultural spaces.
  - b. The NGOCS narrative can be used to address external stakeholders and decision makers and influence them to support reimagining historical spaces into independent spaces for non-dominant culture. Admittedly, it is hard to convince those with no personal affiliation of the value of such spaces, especially when the focus is on purely financial value.
2. **Moments of collective reimagination are essential.** Moments of sharing, reflecting and reimagining are vital on the path towards the next generation of cultural spaces.
  - a. At the local level, to foster internal and multidisciplinary collaboration through round tables such as 'Breaking the Silos,' as well as local conferences and symposia. Collaborative partnerships can assist local projects in becoming a catalyst for further action, as well as in building strong social links and challenging negative social perceptions of communities. Experiencing and feeling their power as a community of people is essential to increasing participation and engaging in the challenges associated with obtaining resources for the upkeep of their spaces.
  - b. At the global level, to facilitate knowledge exchange, expand the translocal alliance and apply pressure on local decision makers through formats such as community calls or the Envisioning Free Space conference.
3. **There is a need for knowledge distribution structures.** Knowledge on obtaining and retaining independent spaces for non-dominant culture is present, mostly among those involved in said spaces and external experts. Despite the knowledge being present, it is sometimes difficult for local initiatives to access the right information at the right moment. Secondly, how this knowledge is being transferred is key. Using a top-down, colonial approach, without taking the local context into account will not lead to positive results. An educational and empowering approach aimed to let the local initiatives be able to 'do it themselves' is the sustainable approach towards the next

generation of cultural spaces. Examples of valuable knowledge are:

- a. Methods for self-mobilisation of initiatives/grassroots communities.
- b. Models and good practices of how existing independent cultural spaces work.
- c. Sources of possible funding, specifically from local communities and international organisations.
- d. Training, information, knowledge and experience, which enable such groups to identify problems and come up with solutions by themselves.
- e. Knowledge about creating self-sustaining financial models.

**4. Focus on the realisation of physical space.** While talking is enjoyable, we must not lose sight of the purpose of creating physical venues for non-dominant culture. Therefore the aim should always be to push for space. Space is what is needed and what really makes the difference.

**5. The goal is sustainable & secure long-term spaces.** The project identifies sustainability and long-term security as critical components of the next generation of cultural spaces. This gives room to experiment and focus on long-term cultural impact, instead of short-term survival. Ownership, legal structures and organisational practices are ways to safeguard sustainability and long-term

security. The following section gives a more detailed definition of what we believe is the next generation of cultural spaces.

The NGOCS project has been shown to be effective in promoting social action around certain issues in the partnering of cultural spaces. While such small changes should not be disregarded, the real challenge lies in connecting spaces with broader social movements for change. For cultural and social activists, the question is not one of a choice between widespread social change or limited local action, but rather of how to link the two to raise local awareness of broader social issues, thus increasing local involvement in them and promoting the overall importance of space for younger, alternative communities.

### ■ 4.3 Defining the next generation of cultural space

One of the outcomes of the NGOCS project is a clear description of what a 'next generation cultural space' is. In addition to providing guidance on what to aspire for when developing the next generation of cultural spaces, the definition is intended to build the narrative for independent culture and serve as fuel for conversation with local stakeholders and decision-makers.

As is clear from the approach of the project, we envision the next generation of cultural spaces as safe spaces where non-dominant youth culture, queer communities and other marginalised groups can thrive. We see often underused and publicly owned

historical spaces as ideal places for hosting the next generation of culture, linking the historical past to a new and inclusive future. The aim is to reimagine and revive these spaces, and more than reviving them, to create long-term sustainable spaces. This extends beyond the concept of temporary usage, in which creatives generate value but do not profit from it. We envision long-term sustainable spaces that are purpose-driven and where value is preserved, 'by the community, for the community'.

### Interconnectedness

This project makes the assumption that, generally speaking, urban and rural areas are densifying. Populations are increasing, as is the pressure on the available land and properties in financial and regulatory terms, as well in terms of potential uses. When deciding on potential uses of vacant spaces, too often the only value model that is taken into account is a finance-based model. This makes it difficult for bottom-up initiatives to obtain such spaces, as their social, cultural and ecological value is often hard to grasp and difficult to translate into economic value. Due to this densification we see a space as being inherently embedded in its surroundings. Even independent spaces need to collaborate with their environment and deal with stakeholders who have an influence on their space. Especially when building a long-term sustainable space, a strong connection and collaboration with the local environment is essential.

Our world is becoming increasingly connected in a digital manner too. Technologies are developing rapidly and there are more and more opportunities for

digital communication, networking and knowledge exchange that can support spaces and initiatives on a local level. Therefore we see connections to translocal networks to be of growing importance. Furthermore such networks have the potential to exert local pressure on decision makers to support local independent cultural initiatives. There are numerous examples of spaces only receiving recognition from their local governments after gaining international attention and acknowledgment.

### **Sustainability and governance**

When looking at sustainability, legal structures and ownership are essential elements. They provide the legal base on which sustainability can be built, protecting the space from being used for personal interests and safeguarding its use for social purposes. Connected to ownership is the factor of time. Time is needed to build a space and community, but also to ensure investments can be made with a sufficient amount of time to pay them back. Ownership needs to be in the hands of the initiative running the space, either through direct ownership of the building, or through a long-term management contract that transfers decision making power to the initiative. With ownership in external hands, no guarantee is in place to safeguard the social purpose of the space. A non-profit legal entity based on statutes that define its social purpose can only be used in service of the collective goal, not to pursue personal interest. In addition to the legal structure, organisational structures can be implemented to arrange things such as meeting plans, decision making processes, roles and responsibilities, conflict resolution, etcetera.

To accomplish the goal of creating a long-term sustainable space, legal structure and accompanying organisational practices are essential. Connected to this are the people that form part of the organisation. In order to create a sustainable base they need to feel valued and compensated, either financially or in other ways, because all too often a lack of appreciation or sharing of responsibilities leads to burnout for those who are most active in independent cultural spaces. In a way, the same goes for the wider community that is involved in the space, for example artists, promoters, visitors or neighbours, whose participation is needed to create and maintain relevance within the local context. Moreover, the wider community has the power to stand up for a space when it is threatened, for instance by forced closure, which can be essential in guaranteeing the survival of the space. Within this context it is important to maintain good relations with other stakeholders that have an influence on the space, such as local administrators, politicians, funders, institutes or property owners. Finally, having a well thought out strategy on income streams and covering expenses is a crucial element for running a sustainable space, so we believe basic knowledge of business models and 'social entrepreneurship' is needed for the next generation of cultural spaces.

### **Local context**

Although we attempt to give generalised definitions, the next generation of cultural spaces will look different in each place and in each case; an independent space can be set up in many different ways, and the model offered here is not the only correct or viable model, as external conditions can vary in each situation. For example, an affordable, temporary space capable of hosting a wide range of cultural activities may well be a good option for some. Alternatively, a temporary space which holds events without the necessary permissions may wish to avoid any contact with unsympathetic or uncooperative local authorities, and rightly so. The internal values and social purpose of each space, however, cannot be altered.

**In summary, these are some of the most critical components that we believe are essential for the implementation of a NGOCS project:**

### **STAKEHOLDERS**

- Behind each NGOCS project, a substantial group of stakeholders should be participating from within the local creative and cultural ecosystem. Broad stakeholder engagement is necessary as NGOCS have to support local creative practices and cultural entities. The lifeblood of a successful NGOCS project is much more than just a space or a building, it is about people.
- Each NGOCS should be designed and developed ground up, deeply embedded in the local cultural context, and must be operated for the benefit of the cultural sector.

## BUSINESS MODEL

- NGOCS should choose a multi-faceted business model that incorporates both nonprofit and for-profit elements. To remain economically sustainable, an NGOCS needs a minimum of 3-4 income streams (such as membership fees, public funding from local/international donors, projects and events, ticket sales, merchandise sales, space rentals, and so on).
- As the intention is to support specialised local creative environments, NGOCS should be designed and established with a long-term development perspective in mind, the longer the better, but with a benchmark aim of 25 years.

## LEGAL STRUCTURE

- To stay sustainable, it is critical for an NGOCS to be involved in the ownership of the consortium or collective that operates it. If there is no path to ownership, a long-term management contract should be in place. Throughout the NGOCS evolutionary process, the value of the property will significantly increase, and ownership status will enable local creative entities to be the beneficiaries of this, which will in turn greatly help any future development prospects.
- The legal structure of NGOCS should be classified as charitable or nonprofit (depending on local laws); not focused on profit maximisation, but rather willing to support a wide range of independent cultural and creative entities and support them on a grass-roots level.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

- Although different NGOCS will share many components among one other, individual NGOCS will greatly differ depending on their geographic location, socio-cultural and political surroundings and needs.

### 4.4 Reflection on project aims

The Next Generation of Cultural Spaces' aim has been threefold. Below we reflect on how we have managed to accomplish these aims.

#### **AIM: Bring together a translocal network of Southern & Eastern European initiatives and spaces for non-dominant culture, changemakers, advocates, academics, institutions and local governments.**

- The NGOCS project has involved over 100 participants from non-dominant cultural initiatives and spaces, advocates, cultural institutions, NGOs, local governments and researchers in the translocal network. By reflecting, discussing and collaborating they have actively reimagined historical spaces for independent space for non-dominant culture in Southern & Eastern Europe. All of these participants are made familiar with the NGOCS narrative and are willing and able to advance the cause in the future.

#### **AIM: Create a direct local impact on independent cultural ecosystems in Tbilisi and Vinschgau Venosta.**

- Both conferences in Tbilisi and South Tyrol sparked interdisciplinary discussions and collaboration processes on the next generation of

cultural spaces. For both local non-dominant cultural ecosystems it has been a push to come together and work towards a shared goal. In South Tyrol, the conference has been followed up by three round tables with local interdisciplinary actors, and more follow-up activities are expected. Through these conferences the translocal alliance managed to highlight non-dominant culture and show political agents, decision makers and the general public that such culture is not only important for a healthy society, but also for a healthy economy. In Tbilisi, collaboration with public decision makers proves to be much more difficult. However the positive impact of exchanging information, networking and connecting with like-minded individuals also applies there.

#### **AIM: Document the process so that it can be developed into a wider, thriving network that supports the development of the next generation of cultural spaces.**

- This project publication contains two extensive case studies, a definition of the next generation of cultural space and numerous lessons learned and recommendations. It lays the basis for the further development of the project's scope. The strong narrative combined with a large interdisciplinary network offers the foundation for actively supporting the realisation of the next generation of cultural spaces, be they new spaces in reimagined historical sites, or active spaces whose sustainability and long-term security is ensured. The potential is there to continue building on this foundation and keep growing impacts for local non-dominant cultural ecosystems in Southern and Eastern Europe.

## ■ 4.5 Recommendations for continuation

To conclude this publication, we present our recommendations for continuation of the work of the Next Generation of Cultural Space project. They are compiled from over a year's input from over 100 independent cultural initiatives and spaces, cultural institutes, NGOs, researchers, political agents and decision makers during international conferences, online community calls, local gatherings, exchanges, conversations and project meetings. It is our aspiration that these recommendations lead to follow up activities aiming to further pursue the mission that has been started by the Next Generation of Cultural Space project.

- 1. Continue to construct and spread the narrative about the value of independent spaces for non-dominant culture.** By including more members in the alliance the common narrative of the next generation of cultural spaces can be shaped further. Use storytelling to engage locally and to create a shared goal. The narrative can be strengthened by data collection and finding ways to measure the value of the spaces. This is especially needed to counter the dominant narrative of financial value as the principal criteria for obtaining space.
- 2. Continue planning local and translocal moments of collective reimagination to bring the narrative of NGOCS further.** To maintain attention for the NGOCS, develop the concept further, and encourage collaboration towards the realisation of spaces, it is important to actively plan moments of coming together to reflect and reimagine. Digital and physical, informal and formal, local and translocal, all such moments of coming together bring the next generation cultural spaces a step closer.
- 3. Improve knowledge distribution structures for independent cultural spaces.** This means (1) to better identify the needs for information of non-dominant cultural initiatives and spaces, (2) to identify which technological developments, such as decentralised and autonomous networks, can be used to build an accessible and transparent structure and (3) to allow for a self-governing approach in the transfer of information, leaving it to the local initiatives to decide on the information they need and to use it in the way they see best fit.
- 4. Follow-up projects should aim for the realisation of physical space.** Appropriating physical space for non-dominant culture is the single most impactful thing for local cultural ecosystems. Future projects should either push for, or support, the process of releasing space. Next to realising space, a secondary goal is to support existing spaces in increasing sustainability and long-term security.
- 5. The next generation of cultural spaces should aim for sustainability and long-term security.** We recommended the spaces be supported by a broad group of stakeholders, developed bottom-up and embedded in the local context, that they have a long-term contract (min. 25 years) with ownership in hands of those who operate it, using a non-profit legal structure and a diverse business model with multiple income streams.

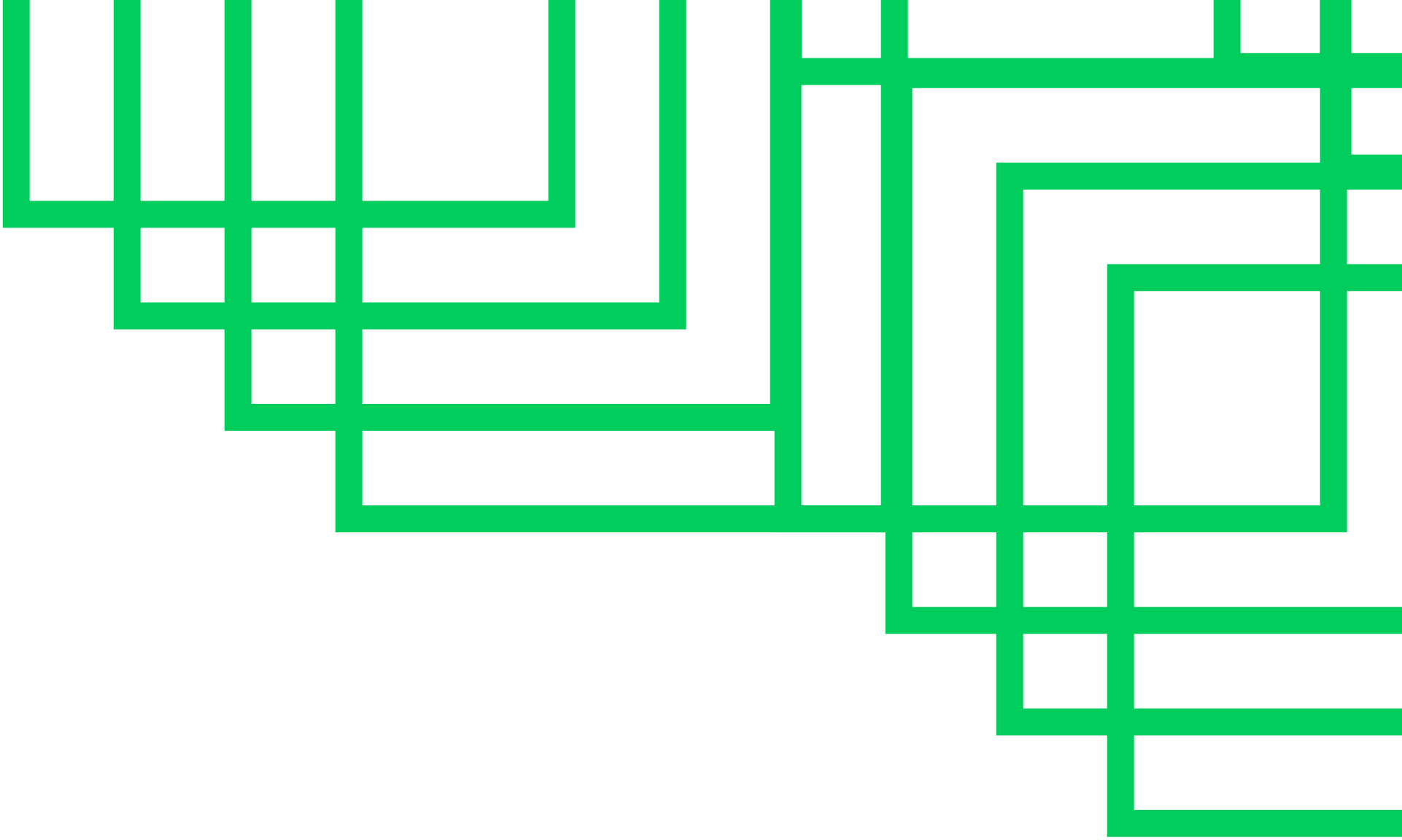


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