



Field Drawing of the International Cultural Policy from Flanders

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Management summary

Introduction

The Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy (ICP), a Flemish cross-policy strategy for 2021-2025, is a relatively new development within the Flemish Cultural Policy. This strategy has three objectives: strengthening the international position of cultural and creative actors, goods and practices, encouraging international cooperation, networking and exchange, and putting Flanders on the world map as 'State of the Art'. The strategy is primarily sector-driven. At the same time, the ICP is used for general image-building and positioning of Flanders abroad. The strategy has a strong focus on activities in other countries, emphasising geographical priorities and synergy between government bodies and intermediary organisations, as well as complementary collaboration between government bodies and intermediary organisations (the sectoral institutes supporting the actors in the different sectors, the funds for the audiovisual and literary sector ...). The various recent societal and sectoral disruptions, which have had an impact on the internationalisation of the cultural sectors, have prompted a review of this prevailing framework. In this context, IDEA Consult was commissioned by the Department of Culture, Youth and Media to draw up a 'Field Drawing of the International Cultural Policy from Flanders'. This Field Drawing is intended to serve as input for recalibrating the ICP. The (sub)sectors within the scope are the following: the visual arts, performing arts, music, circus arts, cultural heritage, socio-cultural work, amateur arts, literature, audiovisual (including film and games), architecture and design. The Field Drawing maps out the developments in these sectors and matches them with the current Strategic Framework. Based on this, several suggestions for improvement were drawn up.

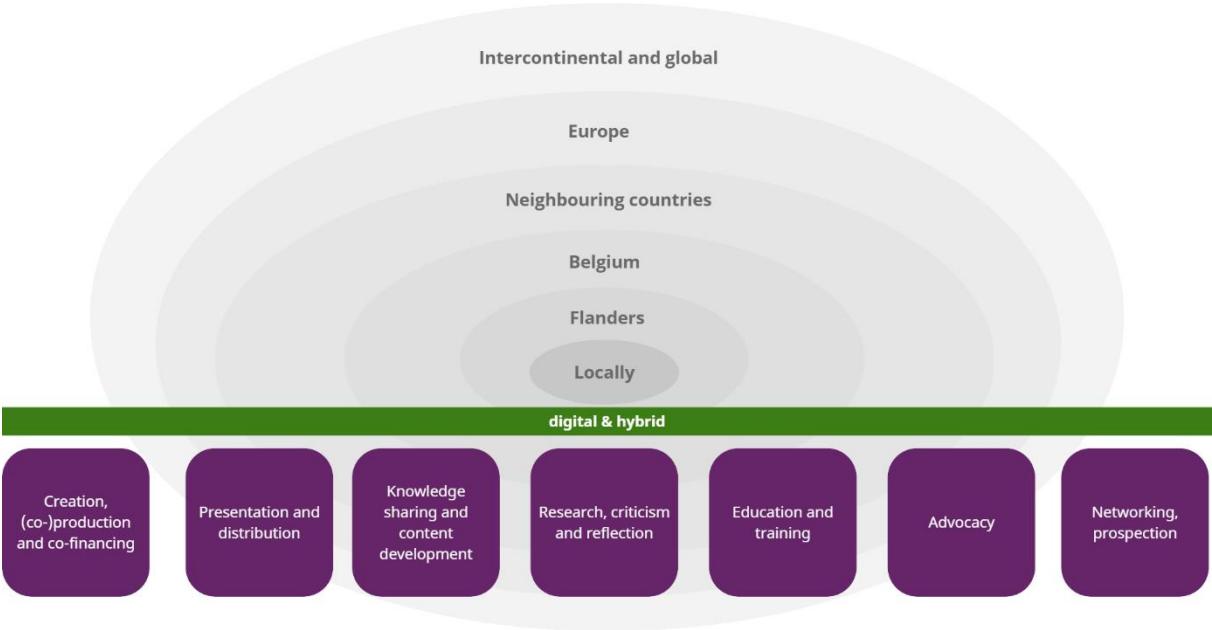
Within the research process, sectoral analyses were first prepared based on desk research, interviews with the intermediary organisations and focus groups with actors from each sector (see annexes, which are only available in Dutch). The insights from these analyses were compiled for a cross-sectoral synthesis in chapters 3 to 5 of the main report. Chapter 2 of this main report provides a compact, forward-looking synthesis of the entire Field Drawing of the International Cultural Policy from Flanders.

The internationalisation of cultural practice

The study starts by identifying international developments in cultural practice. What are the main trends, developments, actors and needs in terms of internationalising the cultural and creative sectors in Flanders? Who is doing what and where? Why is working internationally important? What trends – in the cultural sector and in society as a whole - have an impact on working internationally? What is needed to tap into the potential and added value of working internationally?

In the 2020s, working internationally within the cultural sector has taken both recognisable and surprising forms. On the one hand, there are the familiar examples and stories, where cultural Flemish actors have enjoyed success abroad, for example with Oscar nominations, prestigious international tours, top events in Flanders or awards at renowned theatre festivals... On the other hand, the Field Drawing also features examples of practices that prompt a different look at what internationalisation means today: a socio-cultural organisation that runs a community in the metaverse, international artists' collectives that set up experiments in the area of equitable practices, the debate on the origin or restitution of cultural heritage, the international sale of intellectual property, multilingual festivals that appeal to local and international communities, a game studio with branches in every time zone, so that it can develop around the clock...

In short, projects that can focus on creation, (co-)production and co-financing, presentation and distribution, but also on sharing knowledge and developing content, on research, criticism and reflection, on education and training, etc. These activities may take place locally or elsewhere in Flanders, but also abroad: in neighbouring countries, Europe or other continents. And the digitalisation and hybridisation of cultural practice also means that it is no longer obvious where these practices take place. They often take place in different places and dimensions at the same time.



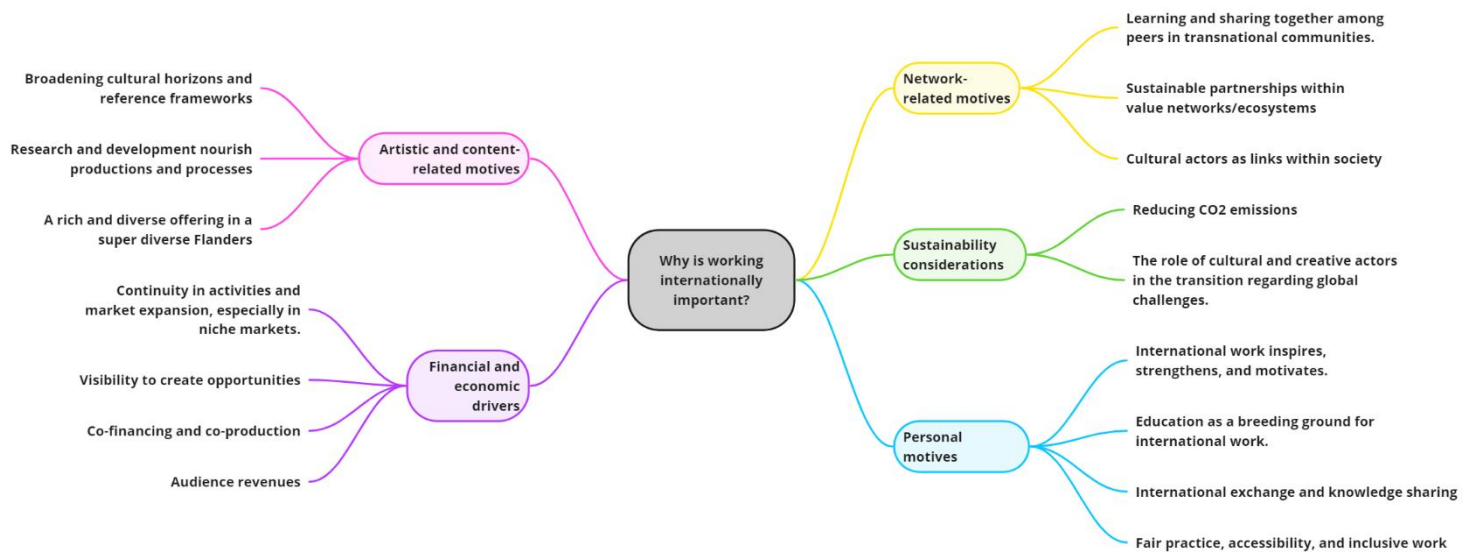
Motivations behind working internationally

If we examine the motivations behind these activities – and where they take place – they are legion in all sectors. On the one hand, artistic and cultural motivations come into play, within ecosystems that tend to have an international frame of reference. On the other hand, financial and economic drivers also play a role in most (sub)sectors. Working internationally is sometimes necessary just to survive. By developing international activities and tapping into value-added content, economic opportunities can be seized to ensure continued viability in Flanders. Considerations at the individual level (the importance of fair practice, mental well-being, etc.) and environmental sustainability considerations are also gaining in importance. For this reason, the Field Drawing puts forward a multidimensional motivational framework that considers content-related, economic, social,



individual and ecological motivations, which play a role in all sectors and niches – profit-driven or otherwise – to varying degrees.

Figure 1: Motivations behind working internationally



Trends: the development and local anchoring of transnational ecosystems

Various social trends in recent years have had a huge impact on how actors and sectors can seize this international potential. These include economic developments on the one hand (e.g. the higher cost of living), but also the interplay of social and technological developments that have had a strong impact on a variety of sectors or value chains – and organisational and business models – in recent years. The Covid pandemic clearly accelerated this trend. On the other hand, there are also broader geopolitical, demographic socio-cultural and ecological developments, which have put themes such as environmental and social sustainability, diversity and inclusion higher on the agenda in international forums in Flanders and especially beyond.



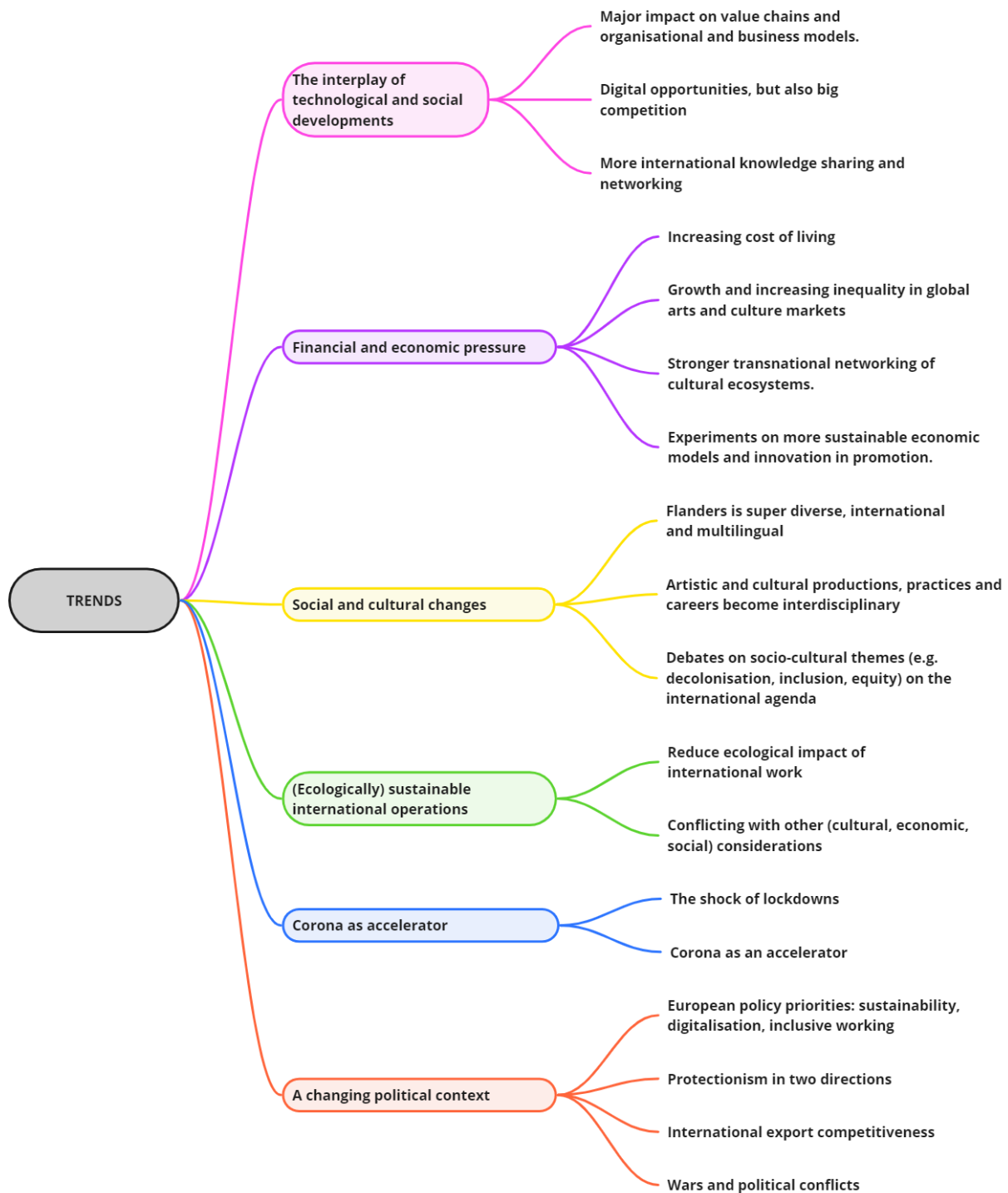


Figure 2: Trends in the field of internationalisation

The impact of these developments on the (internationalisation of) cultural and creative ecosystems has been significant. The study identifies two major movements. On the one hand, these trends are leading to more pressure, competition and acceleration in many sectors. In the process, new opportunities are arising, both in terms of cultural and content-related innovation (e.g. through new technologies, or the possibility of working closely with individuals or organisations on a remote basis) and in terms of economic opportunities in the form of new markets and distribution channels, especially for niche markets.

On the other hand, there has clearly also been a negative impact. The accelerated pace of international exchange is not always sustainable. In many sectors, existing business models are under significant pressure. The fragmentation of resources in international networks is leading to hyper-mobility and increasing pressure on individuals (socio-economic precariousness, mental well-being, etc.) while also bringing the ecological question into focus.

These trends demand an innovative, strategic approach on all possible fronts. What is more, not only do they impact *how* actors work internationally, and what strategies and organisational models and skills are necessary in this regard, the nature of working internationally itself is also fundamentally changing. The flows of cultural development, creation, financing, co-production, distribution and presentation play out on a larger scale (Benelux, European, global). Actors play at these levels simultaneously. Especially in a digital environment, it is difficult to identify 'where' these processes currently play out. The study identifies this trend as 'the development of transnational ecosystems'.

When we refer to 'transnational' networks, it is important to bear in mind that these networks manifest themselves strongly at the local level. In accelerating ecosystems, the connection between the international network and the local context and local communities, is the subject of ever more attention. In many sectors, there is a growing awareness of the fact that production is relocating. Abroad – and also in Flanders – we are seeing that actors working on presentation, participation and education are developing strategies to incorporate an international offering into a local context. The practice within socio-cultural work and the amateur arts has always been strongly anchored at the local level, but actors within these sectors are also active on a much larger geographical scale. Socio-cultural work is part of international movements. Local amateur artists can share their work with communities around the world through social media. In short, local contexts have become international and multilingual spaces, both physically and mentally. Creators and audiences in Flanders are superdiverse and multilingual. Local communities are highly networked at the international level. Cultural players are increasingly becoming the links within both local and international networks and flows.

Needs in the field of internationalisation

In this changing context, the various sectors have a wide range of needs. On the one hand, there are content-related and cultural needs, such as the necessary time and space for developing their artistic skills and craft, and methodological expertise. On the other hand, consideration for financial needs is crucial: working internationally requires investment and access to resources. In this battle for resources, visibility in international networks is essential. Finding your way in international networks demands the necessary competencies and capacities.

In all subsectors, there are questions relating to financial resources, knowledge and capacity, and networks. But these conceal two types of needs and requirements. On the one hand, there is demand for stronger, more competitive positioning and a demand for 'export support'. This can be seen in a demand for resources, visibility, innovation, capacity and competencies, as well as knowledge about developments in the field. On the other hand, we also see initiatives in many sectors focusing on systemic change towards more sustainable international practice, at the cultural, economic, social and environmental levels. There is a strong need for new approaches not based on competition, but on the principles of collaboration and solidarity. In an accelerating international context, how do we create the space to go at a slower pace, the time for local anchoring and meaningful engagements with communities, environmental sustainability, and inclusiveness?

As similar questions arise also more broadly and in other domains of society, can the cultural and creative players also be pioneers in a broader social transition towards a more sustainable society? A range of experiments in



various subsectors are exploring this, both in Flanders and in a transnational context, especially in design, architecture, cultural heritage....

The match with current and future international cultural policy

How do the needs of the cultural and creative sectors relate to current Flemish and international cultural policy – more specifically, the Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy which is currently in place - and how can the international impact of current Flemish international cultural policy be improved? What are the current gaps? What points for improvement are possible for the future International Cultural Policy?

In the study a number of gaps have been identified while matching the Strategic Framework and the needs and trends in the practice described above.

- ▶ To start with, there is a need to update the basic starting points. It is important to take position with regard to the main issues at stake in the different cultural ecosystems, where increasingly complex interactions are taking place on the transnational level - and the fact that the international dimension is not only a matter of 'activities abroad', but also very present at the local level, in Flanders.
- ▶ There is a gap between the current strategic framework for International Cultural Policy and the way it is implemented. For instance, there is too little collaboration and coordination, even though these are priorities in the Strategic Framework.
- ▶ There is a need for a long-term perspective and more transparency, given that current choices are often ad hoc and criteria often not made explicit. The framework does not provide enough direction.
- ▶ There is a need for more effective knowledge building and monitoring that can inform the strategy. The study identifies several potential suggestions for improvement.

Besides reassessing the basic premises and objectives, there are a number of points for improvement relating to processes.





Figure 3: Overview of recommendations



Reassessing the principles

The positioning of Flemish cultural policy in transnational cultural ecosystems	Managing complex, transnational system dynamics is challenging for any national or regional government. There is a significant need for targeted, specific injections into sectoral ecosystems, while specific constraints also need to be eliminated.
The need for a flexible, adaptive and context-based strategy with a long-term perspective	The substantial volatility in transnational ecosystems calls for an agile approach, focusing on experimentation, incentives, learning, etc., with a view to a changing environment, the context, and the demand side.
Consideration for the local anchoring of these transnational ecosystems	Taking the international, superdiverse and multilingual reality of Flanders into account is crucial. It is possible to capitalise on this in conjunction with cities, municipalities and the supra-local cultural level as partners.
Consideration for the value and preconditions for meaningful international exchange	Achieving the international potential in a fair and meaningful way, depends upon preconditions such as fair practice and inclusive, environmentally sustainable work. The ICP can make this explicit, identify preconditions and propose incentives.
Collaboration as the guiding principle	To generate impact in complex systems, collaboration and coordination between and within sectors, the intermediary organisations, policy areas, levels of government, and priority partners (French-speaking Belgium and the Netherlands) is an absolute prerequisite.

Reassessing the objectives

Sector-specific objective: strengthen the position of Flemish actors in their international context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Funding for international projects and processes (both easily accessible and flexible, and large-scale projects/'breakthroughs') ▶ A toolkit for collective promotion, network development and support for practice. ▶ Sufficient 'carrying capacity', capacity and competencies for the cultural actors themselves.
Cross-sectoral objective: incentivising the switch to more sustainable international practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Work on common themes/challenges from a cross-sectoral perspective. ▶ Incentives for innovation and experimentation, pilots and "living" labs. ▶ Space for connecting and evaluating these experiments in shared learning pathways.
Cross-policy area objective: valorise the strengths of the Flemish cultural field within the broader Flemish policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Valorise the cultural strengths/assets within broader government policy. ▶ Put Flanders on the map both in terms of its artistic and cultural excellence and as a pioneer in sustainable innovation and development. ▶ Reassess bilateral cultural relations (interregional and international) and geographical focus areas.



Points for improvement relating to processes

From strategy to action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Strategic vision development: Stakeholder analysis, determining policy options, objectives and priorities, in accordance with the mission and desired vision.▶ Translate into lines of action, including evaluation, adapting the toolkit and envisioning adequate resources and staff capacity.▶ Both the international dimension in sectoral policy (Field Drawings, Strategic Vision Notes) and via an overarching Strategic Framework for ICP.
Investing in knowledge building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Long-term perspective on monitoring, as part of a learning process.▶ Quantitative and qualitative, with consideration for context and horizon scan.
Collaboration in the practice of ICP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Need for better coordination and collaboration in the practice.▶ Develop joint strategy, identify added value, make choices, activate networks.▶ Sufficient capacity, in any event stronger management and possibly a stronger actor in international cultural policy.



1 / Introduction

1.1. Context and question

Many Flemish cultural and creative institutions and actors work internationally on a daily or occasional basis, both in Flanders and abroad. In the process of internationalisation, large and small cultural institutions, individual artists and creative makers, for-profit or non-profit, are remarkable successes, strengthening the image of Flanders and Flemish cities, and attracting the attention of international audiences, press and politicians. For the Flemish government, strengthening the international dimension of cultural and creative sectors is essential, among other things because it valorises the highly diverse qualities and unique features of these sectors in Flanders. As such, Flemish cities – and Flanders as a whole – also remain attractive as creative and cultural incubators for international talent and innovative initiatives and visitors. In this way, the internationalisation of culture and the creative industry is also linked to the tourist, economic and diplomatic profiling of Flanders in the world.

For the period 2021-2025, the Government of Flanders has adopted a [Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy](#). This was the first time that a joint strategy was adopted from the various policy areas involved (Culture, Foreign Affairs, Economy, Tourism). The main objectives are strengthening the international visibility and presence of cultural actors, products and practices, encouraging international collaboration, networking and exchange, and putting Flanders on the world map as 'State of the Art'. Priority (geographical) focus areas were also identified within this framework. However, a lot has happened since this strategic framework was adopted: disruptive changes and trends came in rapid succession, both in society in general and in the cultural and creative sectors specifically. Societal developments prompt a different look at the how and why of working internationally in culture. Think of such diverse trends as the digital transformation, a global pandemic and lockdowns, geopolitical conflicts and their social and economic consequences, the transition to an ecologically more sustainable society, discussions on diversity and inclusion,... At the very least, these and other trends – the way they interact and their impact on the various cultural subsectors – call for a serious reassessment of policy strategy, preferably underpinned by a solid empirical basis.

For this reason, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media commissioned IDEA Consult to produce a 'Field Drawing of International Cultural Policy from Flanders', which answers two central research questions:

1. Research question 1. What are the main trends, developments, actors and needs in terms of internationalising the cultural and creative sectors in Flanders?

To this end, the following sub-questions are addressed:

- a. *Who does what and where?* What types of actors are involved in what types of activities, and where do these take place?
- b. *Why is working internationally important,* both for cultural actors and for society? What are the motivations behind working internationally? What is the added value and potential of working internationally for society?
- c. *What trends* – currently have an impact on working internationally?
- d. *What is needed* to tap into the potential and added value of working internationally?



2. **Research question 2. How do the needs of the cultural and creative sectors relate to current Flemish and international cultural policy (strategic framework) and how can the international impact of current Flemish cultural policy be improved?** The following sub-questions are addressed in this regard:
 - a. What are the current *gaps* in the International Cultural Policy?
 - b. What suggestions *or improvement* are possible for the future International Cultural Policy?

The study focuses on the cultural subsectors within the scope of International Cultural Policy. Specifically, these are 'the professional arts (including literary, audiovisual, architectural, design and circus arts); cultural heritage and cultural heritage organisations; and adult social-cultural work and amateur arts' (Strategic Framework International Cultural Policy, p. 1-2).

1.2. Plan of approach and reading guide

This Field Drawing of International Cultural Policy from Flanders was first approached sector-specifically, before switching to a synthesis which is relevant to the broader cultural field, as described above. Preparatory sectoral outlines were first made for the circus arts, amateur arts, socio-cultural work, cultural heritage, literary arts, visual arts, performing arts, music, the audiovisual sector (including film and games), architecture and design. These were then synthesised – considering sector-specific nuances – and further analysed in terms of policy implications. The following are the research steps in more detail:

- ▶ **Phase 1. Sector-specific analysis.** Both research questions were first addressed in their sector-specific contexts during the spring of 2023. After examining the available sectoral knowledge base (landscape drawings, figures-based and other analyses, relevant policy texts and trend analyses, etc.), 10 interviews were conducted with intermediary organisations responsible for the internationalisation of the different subsectors (sectoral institutes, funds). A diverse focus group discussion was then organised for each subsector, with actors from the field who had proven experience in internationalisation. For each (sub-)sector, the number of participants was limited to an average of 5. The focus groups had a wide diversity of voices and perspectives from the entire cultural field: artists, authors, designers and architects, producers, performance venues and festivals, managers, umbrella organisations and support organisations, associations and civil actors, publishers, educational players, etc.
- ▶ **Phase 2. Cross-sectoral synthesis of motivations, trends and needs.** In the following phase, the research team first compiled the answers to Research Question 1 into a draft synthesis report for the broad cultural field. This includes a synthesis for a) the motivation b) the trends that have an impact and c) the resources needed for working internationally.
- ▶ **Phase 3. Gap analysis.** In this phase, the synthesis from Phase 2 was compared with the current Strategic Framework of International Cultural Policy, and the identified gaps and potential points for improvement. In this regard, the insights gained in the above-mentioned desk research, interviews and focus groups were taken into account, in addition to 4 (extra) interviews with policy bodies (2 interviews with a total of 5 staff members of the DCYM, an interview with the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office (DKBUZA in Dutch) and VISITFLANDERS (Toerisme Vlaanderen/TVL in Dutch), and finally a workshop with the sectoral intermediary organisations (sectoral institutes, funds,...). Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT) provided written input.



- ▶ **Phase 4. Reporting.** IDEA Consult compiled all the insights into a final report. The main report, without the annexes, is translated to English.

Reading guide

The reporting consists of the following sections:

- ▶ The 'Field Drawing for International Cultural Policy from Flanders' report starts with an introduction and a compact synthesis chapter, in which the main insights are compiled in a concise narrative. Chapter §2 / is a synthesis and condensing of the insights from the complete Field Drawing, primarily aimed at supporting the future policy development.
- ▶ The underpinnings are presented in chapters 3 to 5 and in the annexes, and provide a more detailed rationale, including various illustrations and examples from Flemish and international practice.
 - The *Field Drawing of Internationalisation* (§3 /), with the overarching, culture-wide synthesis of the sectoral insights for Research Question 1 (who, what, where, why, trends and resources).
 - This is followed by the *Gap Analysis* in two subchapters, in which the reader will first find an overview of the identified gaps (§4 /) and then the possible suggestions for improvement as regards these gaps (§5 /).
- ▶ Sectoral analyses are included in the appendix (in Dutch only), in addition to a list of sources and consulted interlocutors. Here the reader will find a summary of the research findings for each subsector for Research Question 1 and the underlying sub-questions. These analyses include a synthesis of the desk research of the existing source material and additional insights from interviews with the intermediary organisations and one focus group discussion for each sector. There may be varying levels of elaboration depending on the existing knowledge base. The analyses also contain important gaps for most subsectors. The different sectoral sub-analyses therefore start with an assessment of the knowledge base in which these gaps are identified. Insights gleaned are also incorporated into policy recommendations.



2 / Synthesis: working transnationally in a changing society

Nowadays, working internationally in the cultural and creative sector takes many different forms. From European co-productions, performances, shows and tours, exhibitions in project spaces, lending objects to other museums and art halls, to numerous large and small gatherings and exchanges in international networks, debates, fairs and showcases, residencies or visitor programmes. Working internationally can take recognisable but also surprising and unexpected forms. There are news reports on international successes, including an Oscar nomination for the film [Close](#) or a Flemish company winning an award at an international theatre festival (such as [Ontroerend Goed in Edinburgh](#)) or EUMiesAwards for Flemish architecture, where [various Flemish projects](#) have been given their due in recent years. But it is also about a socio-cultural organisation that builds communities in an alternative, digital environment ([Voem launches its own Metaverse 'Diverzcity'](#)), a Flemish game studio that – 'follow the sun' – sets up development offices in Quebec, Dublin and Kuala Lumpur, among other places, - to be able to work and develop 'around the clock' - and attracts international attention in the process ([Baldur's Gate 3 Devs Larian Studios Opens Malaysia Branch, Positions Available | Geek Culture](#)). It can be about international collectives of artists and art workers who are working together to put various themes on the international agenda (e.g. [What is a feminist server?](#)) or about a dance school that holds auditions on several continents, from Sao Paolo to Tokyo ([PARTS](#)).

What we see on stages, in cinemas, exhibition spaces, at home and abroad, or on our phone and other screens, is hardly ever the result of a coincidence. For some organisations and artists it is a one-off foray, for others it is a structural pillar in a strategic organisational model and requires the necessary investments, sustainable international networks and building the necessary knowledge and professional skills to work internationally. This applies to both grassroots and non-established initiatives, as well as established institutions and creators, to large and small organisations, and in fact to all disciplines and sectors. In this regard, working internationally has long since ceased to be merely about 'export' (from Flanders to other regions and countries) and 'import' (from elsewhere to Flanders), but is also about all intermediate forms of interaction and interrelationships through local and global networks, financial and artistic co-productions, project-based and structural partnerships, in a physical, hybrid or digital setting.

In this chapter, we summarise the main conclusions from the Field Drawing of International Cultural Policy from Flanders. For details, nuances and illustrations we refer to Chapters 3, 4 and 5 (below) and the annexes (available only in the Dutch version of the report).

2.1. The value and significance of working internationally

For organisations and actors in the cultural sector, working internationally has increasingly become the obvious choice. For their artistic or cultural development, it is crucial to find inspiration and gain insight, to appeal to new and more diverse audiences. The activities need to have the necessary continuity, the market needs to be expanded, new talent needs to be nurtured, to professionalise or bolster the competitive position within and beyond Flanders. In existing studies and sources, the considerations of whether to go international have often remained implicit. This Field Drawing fleshes out the value and significance of working internationally for the cultural field, based on what we learned from interviews with stakeholders and analyses of (policy) documents (see 3.2). This includes both the importance of working internationally for the own practice of cultural operators, and the cultural and social value they want to create in the process.



Five dimensions were identified in this regard:

1. *The artistic and cultural value of international works.* Cultural frames of reference in all subsectors are international. Working internationally is therefore an important power source for cultural and creative practices. Taking an international approach fosters the development of the *métier*, of artistic, cultural and methodological competencies. Working (together) internationally also drives research and development, and innovation and insight, by bringing together a variety of expertise, approaches and perspectives. A rich and varied (international) offer in Flanders and Brussels also brings new perspectives to an audience that is becoming more (super)diverse and multilingual.
2. *Individual motivations.* Working internationally inspires, strengthens and motivates people, for example, in their exchange with peers and like-minded people, or because work is shared with new audiences and in new contexts. International exchange also stimulates the development of talent, professionalism and knowledge building. This applies to both cultural and creative professionals and amateurs.
3. *Economic motivations.* Working internationally is (increasingly) an essential part of the business model, and essential to achieve sufficient continuity in cultural activities. Revenue at an international level is often (also) a necessary condition for sustainable career or organisational development. This may involve various resources, including buy-out fees, support from co-producers, international investors, international funds, visitors, and crowdfunding within international communities and audiences.
4. *Social and network value.* Besides being a way to achieve the above-stated cultural and commercial objectives, developing networks is enriching and stimulating. Exchanging with *peers* is enriching and stimulating. A network of stakeholders within the ecosystem is also necessary for individuals to be able to seize opportunities. Working internationally also adds value to local communities. These local communities in Flanders and Brussels are increasingly superdiverse, multilingual and internationally networked. Diverse cultural organisations - socio-cultural associations, performance venues, residencies, festivals, etc. - are the proverbial links between these local and international networks.
5. *Ecological considerations* increasingly play a role. Actors find it important to take a climate-conscious approach to their work, especially in an international context, where, for example, production and mobility have a non-negligible climate impact. Working internationally can also highlight sustainability issues.

2.2. A changing society

To unlock these potential values, many different profiles of cultural actors, with diverse backgrounds, are involved in international activities, which can take place 'anywhere': at home or in neighbouring countries, in Europe or also at the intercontinental or global level. The activities may be focused on knowledge sharing or developing practice (e.g. at study days, workshops, often in the context of international network gatherings), on cultural creation or production (both content-related, financial and logistical), presentation (both promotional in a B2B context and for a wider audience) and educational or participatory (e.g. overarching initiatives, workshops, etc.).

For some these are occasional forays, for others these activities are recurrent and an inextricable part of their artistic or cultural practice, or an essential link in the organisational model, in which various resources are brought together in an international context: people and funds, knowledge, finance and infrastructure. In this way, the potential of working internationally on the above-mentioned dimensions can be enabled and exploited.

In addition to the question of what international activities will be developed – and by whom, where, and with which motivations – the Field Drawing also considered the potential impact of social, cultural, demographic,



technological, political and environmental trends and developments having an influence on this potential. This trend analysis shows that various changes have far-reaching impact on the international dynamics in cultural ecosystems and the capacity of Flemish actors to move within them. For more details, we refer to Chapter 3 (see 3.3) and the sectoral analyses in the annexes. We summarise the most striking, and sometimes seemingly contradictory, trends below.

2.2.1 Competition and acceleration at the international level

A first observation is that the economic pressure on just about all cultural ecosystems has risen significantly due to various environmental factors (the energy crisis, wars, inflation, etc.). For all sectors, higher living costs - inflation, the energy crisis, etc., resulting in rising wages, production and transport costs - have a significant influence on the opportunities to work internationally. This affects specifically the sectors where labour costs are substantial, such as in the audiovisual sector - films and series - and games where development and production are highly labour-intensive. Clearly also in the 'live' sectors - the performing arts, circus and live music - performances and concerts require a lot of labour night after night. The higher equipment and production costs are also weighing on many sectors, such as architecture and design. In some of these sectors, higher costs are therefore leading to 'more' internationalisation, in the form of outsourcing development and production to low-wage countries.

The higher cost of living comes at a time when the interplay of technological and sociocultural developments has dramatically turned value chains and revenue models upside down. The rise of social media (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, etc.), streaming services (Spotify, Netflix, etc.), online retail on the global or regional scale (Amazon, Bol.com) and other digital platforms aimed at professionals and wider audiences (such as Bandcamp, Artsy, etc.) are having a major impact on all processes relating to development, production, distribution and presentation of cultural goods and services. This has been going on for some time already, and the global pandemic accelerated things in the early 2020s. It is especially prevalent in the sectors where products are distributed digitally, such as music, film, series, games and literature. But even in sectors where physical production is still important, such as visual arts and design, the new opportunities are putting pressure on existing promotion models and strategies.

In all these sectors, new opportunities have emerged in the areas of promotion and distribution of artistic and cultural productions, for instance via online exhibitions, performances, archives, films and series, games or music and global online communication. This has advantages - the possibility to cater to a larger and more international audience, at home and abroad - and downsides, such as a bigger offer leading to a much larger cross-border competition. Similarly, generative AI, virtual and augmented reality, and immersive technologies are creating new opportunities and challenges for artistic and cultural production.

The interplay of these economic, social, technological and cultural changes is having a major impact on existing organisational and business models in several sectors. This was already happening in music, film and the broader audiovisual sectors, but we observe currently also in the performing arts, visual arts, design and literary arts that traditional business models are under significant pressure, both in non-profit (including pressure on playing series for internationally-active companies within the performing arts), and in for-profit sectors (including bankruptcies of galleries and fairs). Although there are more international opportunities, international competition has also grown. The traditional heavyweights are struggling, while new players and working models are on the rise.



The whole situation seems to be giving rise to notable paradoxes and frictions. In various cultural and creative sectors, there is a growth of an overall turnover (such as in music, visual arts or games)¹. Especially the large international players seem to be capitalising on the situation and are scaling up. Small and medium-sized initiatives and individual actors in practice find themselves in a more vulnerable and precarious position.

All this is accelerating the rate of internationalisation. To survive in competitive ecosystems, having an international presence is more crucial than ever for many artists. In a context where budgets are under pressure and there are more networking opportunities, more and more projects and productions are funded and made possible by bringing together resources (knowledge and expertise, capacity, funding, infrastructure, etc.) in an international context, but often on a project basis without a long-term perspective. Smaller organisations, companies and individual actors are themselves responsible for bringing these resources together and maintaining international networks. In this context, reference is made to 'hypermobility', or the unwanted acceleration of internationalisation and international mobility which is necessary to create opportunities in a context of fragmentation and competition. This hypermobility comes with various negative aspects. Many artists experience significant pressure to always stay in the spotlight, remain flexible and available, and be at the demand of third parties. Many opportunities are project-based and short-term. That makes it difficult to get involved in something longer-term and carve out an artistic or content-related arc on your own. The acceleration and competition translate into pressure on individuals, artists and culture professionals: in socio-economic vulnerability, burn-out or mental exhaustion, in the difficulty of maintaining social relationships because they are often abroad. These issues are no longer taboo in many sectors in recent years, and there are more and more explicit calls to take a more 'caring' approach to work within competitive sectors. Furthermore, in an international context, awareness of the negative climate impact and CO2-emissions and discussions about unequal relationships with actors from the global South, and themes such as diversity and inclusion are increasingly playing a decisive role in debates and considerations on working internationally.

In short, the Field Drawing of International Cultural Policy from Flanders makes the potential of working internationally explicit. At the same time, the trend analysis sheds light on the increased complexity of working internationally for actors in the different cultural ecosystems. There are new opportunities, but also difficulties in capitalising on the potential of working internationally. In any case, all these developments are not only having a major impact on *how* actors work internationally. The nature of international work itself is also fundamentally changing. In many subsectors, referring to purely 'Flemish cultural ecosystems', in which the production and distribution of goods and processes first take place on a Flemish scale before going international, is already a thing of the past. In many cultural and creative sectors, revenue from the Flemish market is too small to cover the production costs or provide sufficient continuity for the activities. As a result, different processes in the chain increasingly take place simultaneously at the local, international and digital levels. This is leading to the development of what we refer to as 'transnational ecosystems' and value chains. By this we mean that the flows of cultural development, creation, financing, co-production, distribution and presentation do not take place exclusively in a Flemish context, but increasingly on a larger geographical scale (within the Benelux or at the European level or globally) or even irrespective of geography. New models of co-production, co-financing and investment models have since emerged. One striking element is that many cultural actors are active simultaneously at all these geographical levels and in a virtual reality. 'Here' and 'there' are increasingly difficult

¹ See e.g. [Music moves Europe - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#), p. 11% "Music consumption is on the rise across Europe and the European music industry revenues are growing, led by growth in streaming and live revenues. This growth trend is expected to continue, as shown by recent prospective studies by Goldman Sachs on the future of the music industry." For figures on different cultural and creative subsectors, see Statista.com, for example for [games](#).



to distinguish. Within these transnational and digital networks and flows, cultural actors from all over the planet are trying to gain a foothold.

These developments are taking place in a broader economic and geopolitical context, which has an impact on the way cultural policies are being positioned. In several countries, for example of Poland, Hungary, the UK, the United States, etc. cultural policies have been retreating to their own national context. This is manifesting itself in a variety of ways, both within the cultural policies of these countries and in their broader international positioning. In several countries, stages and performance venues with a strong international profile have been scaled back by their own national cultural policies, with a mandate to focus on a primarily national profile. Take the Malta Festival in Poznan, which was an important platform for presenting Flemish performing arts and music in Poland. And war(s) and geopolitical conflicts also have their impact on the arts internationally; existing collaborations (Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Iran, etc.) have had to be stopped out of necessity, and in the process, institutions and artists have also been left to their fate.

In many interviews, increasing protectionism was raised as a factor that hinders Flemish actors from developing international relations. This protectionist recoil around cultural policy is taking place within a broader political context of retreating into the nation-state, often with the objective of strengthening the economy (e.g. Brexit). In these and other countries, administrative and legal barriers have been put up that make it difficult for Flemish actors to work internationally, because they are costly and time-consuming. The situation and context in the UK or the US are different to that in Poland or Hungary, but the effects and consequences (less cooperation, more focus on native institutions, borders closed, higher tariffs) are similar. The sackings of various directors of Polish institutions in Europe and in the United States, with whom good contacts had been established over time, is on a whole different scale. Elsewhere, the German government recently announced that some of the Goethe Institutes in (Western) Europe will be closed for geopolitical reasons. In any case, these developments make smooth cooperation more difficult, and they are narrowing views both inward and outward.

2.2.2 The local anchoring of working internationally

Despite these changes in and toward increasingly complex, 'transnational' value chains, the local anchoring and embedding of cultural practices also remains essential in many ways. To start with, most sectors and niches often still have the same international hotspots and places for encounter as cities like Avignon, Milan, Venice, New York or Tokyo, which are at the same time the gateway to local, regional and/or international markets. At the same time, new places for encounter are emerging. More and more, promotion, networking and the collective debate on sectorial developments are being organised on niche platforms or online.

Stages, concert halls, museums or companies tend to have strong local roots. Not just in terms of having a building or a physical presence and collection, but they are just as much part of local networks and communities of audiences and visitors, funders, stakeholders, ambassadors, etc. This is the case for many professional cultural organisations working in the areas of presentation, participation and education. Given the accelerated pace of internationalisation described above, we see a great need for venues in the arts to place greater emphasis on the cross-linking of international scenes with local communities.

This is also the case for subsectors with a strong local anchoring, such as socio-cultural work and the amateur arts. These have always been and will remain strongly locally anchored in Flanders. Meanwhile two fundamental shifts are taking place as well. First, local or regional initiatives are also increasingly active simultaneously on a much larger geographic scale. One example is socio-cultural work, where locally anchored movements are working on issues that play out at the global level and are also part of multinational organisations and networks. Or the



amateur arts, where it has become more common to exchange work with international communities through social networks and digital platforms (Bandcamp, Instagram). Especially in music where many musicians and bands whose musical activities are not enough to make a living from in their own local context, can have a strong international presence within international and global DIY communities (e.g. metal, punk, electronic niches, hip-hop, etc.). Or for example the free-time segment in the circus arts, where the so-called 'circus ateliers' – spaces where circus lovers from all ages can improve their skills via workshops – have international networks and invite teachers, creators and amateur production groups so they can showcase their talent internationally.

And second, local contexts have also increasingly become international spaces: physical, mental and/or personal. These range from the many local or urban initiatives and networks, which operate and profile themselves internationally at the same time; from art cities to an international City of Design or a European Capital of Culture Year. Many Flemish cities and towns are now superdiverse and multilingual. They are places where makers and visitors with a migration or diaspora background, 3rd- or 4th-generation migrant families and newcomers with very diverse histories work and live. They range from expats, artists from other contexts who temporarily or permanently settle in Flanders because they work or study at cultural organisations, to people who were forced to flee their country². And an increasing number of international tourists - rising once again after the pandemic - are coming here, attracted by the international reputation and easy accessibility of Flanders and Brussels.

In short, there is a large international, multilingual community in Flanders with a need for cultural challenge, stimulation, emotions, inspiration, personal development and intercultural interaction. Cultural actors have much to offer them, but for many it is a challenge to connect with their own needs and dealing with the ever-changing needs and aspirations of increasingly diverse communities and temporary residents.

2.3. Two types of needs from practice

Based on the research, we observe that on the one hand, cultural life in Flanders is more international than ever. On the other hand, the usual working models are being called into question and the pressure on projects, people and networks is rising in a highly competitive environment. Therefore, it is no surprise that there are strong needs and demands to strengthen the international position of Flemish cultural actors. The research stated that these needs and demands are highly diverse. They pertain to funding, the need for visibility, content development, commercial professionalism or network development, and deal with complex issues that come with the above-mentioned developments, such as digitisation, inclusion and environmental sustainability (see below chapter 3.4 and the relevant sections in the sectoral annexes).

We see two types of underlying positions. On the one hand, there are many actors who come with a strong demand for support in the current context in which competition is becoming more intense. On the other hand, there is also the need and/or desire to focus on systemic change, at the level of the sectors as well as society to bring about a more sustainable international practice.

² What is more, the access people have to transnational ecosystems is strongly determined by where they were born. Indeed, working internationally demands certain resources: content-related and commercial knowledge, networks, funding and the necessary paperwork. These resources are not evenly distributed geographically. [Recent research into the performing arts](#) in Creative Europe countries shows that transnational ecosystems are not a level playing field: access to international work is highly dependent on the cultural policy context, government policy and the available resources for international cultural policy, for training and development, purchasing power, etc. Western and Northern European players have better access than actors from, say, the Balkans or other more isolated regions. At the global scale, the right passport is an important condition for any kind of travel, and it is becoming ever more difficult for organisations in Flanders and Brussels to work with artists from the global south. For inspiration, see also: <https://valiz.nl/en/publications/forces-of-art>



2.3.1 A stronger, more competitive positioning and demand for 'export support'.

Many actors express the need to strengthen their position in ultra-competitive, transnational cultural ecosystems. In general, there is strong demand for 'export support'. The demand for support manifests itself for example as a demand for more visibility and opportunities to perform and showcase, both individually and collectively. Also, for more and different forms of funding, and efficient and effective support to be more visible in the transnational context and open opportunities (whether collectively or not, supported by funds, supports or government bodies). At the level of the actors themselves, there is also a significant need for capacity building in terms of professionalism, international entrepreneurship, skills, knowledge of the field and network development. Indeed, merely focusing on exposure and creating opportunities is not impactful or sustainable if the actors do not have the professional capacity to also translate these opportunities into contracts, sales, etc., and make the cycle of turning visibility and networking into a mobilisation of resources recurrent. Here we unpack the main related questions.

First, many of those interviewed expressed the demand for funding to work internationally. This manifests itself in all sectors in a demand for flexible support to enable various forms of international work (performance, but also development-oriented activities)³. The questions raised in many subsectors are similar: the budgets are insufficient, the sector-specific policy instruments are not accessible enough (e.g. not well known enough, not recognisable due to unfamiliar jargon, no capacity to file applications) and not adapted enough to the (current) processes, rationales and timing within the value chains ('not sector-specific enough'). In short, in all sectors, there is a need for flexible funding instruments that allow actors to react quickly to international opportunities.

Simultaneously, there's a lack of instruments and budgets to scale up and play a distinctive role in international forums. This is reflected in a demand for larger budgets for 'breakthrough trajectories', large-scale productions and exhibitions, or - within the museum sector - into a demand for sufficient resources to engage within larger consortia for research and presentation. Respondents indicate that the scale of museums in Flanders is too small to compete at the top level. Museums in Flanders are primarily supported at the local level, with only limited funding at the Flemish level -there where the international cultural policy and financing is anchored. Artists therefore must rely on additional, project-based subsidies, where there is a significant pre-investment in time or for fees to make an application, even if there is international interest in their work. And many organisations would like to make an application within the Creative Europe programme but cannot afford the high labour costs and pre-investment that come with the application, due to the high risks, and therefore don't bother applying.

Second, we see a need for innovation in various areas. In many sectors, traditional models for development, financing and production are under pressure as the existing platforms for distribution and promotion no longer work as they should, or are being called into question, or because competition is fierce. Also examples of new organisational approaches can be found in Flanders: the game studio that opens departments in different time zones; material designers who shift production of their designs to low-wage environments; experiments with immersive technology within music, performing arts and social-cultural work; music managers focussing on data-driven marketing and promotion.

With all these new emerging possibilities, for example through digital and technological developments, there is already a wide range of exciting ideas and experiments and accumulated in several places. The question is how this can be translated into new and sustainable business models for the future. Respondents indicated that other countries and regions are focusing more intensively and structurally on cross-sector innovation within the arts,

³ We note that the policy instruments available differ in a decree-related or fund-based context. Within the instruments managed by the DCYM, there is a trend toward an open and at the same time more generic approach via interventions and project grants. Funds are developing a more targeted toolkit that enable specific interventions in transnational ecosystems. Translation subsidies are a good example in this regard.



technology and science. Digital transformation is also gaining momentum in Flanders. For example, the policy on the digital transformation, and Flanders Technology Innovation/[FTI](#), has also emphasised this innovation potential. But the current policy options do not yet address these concrete needs around internationalisation of the cultural sectors. There is a gap to be bridged.

Third, the existing frameworks for collective international promotion (fairs, showcases, visitor programmes, etc.) also require innovation and a flexible, adaptive strategy. In many sectors (e.g. design and the visual arts), there is a movement away from a more general, one-size-fits-all approach on the big platforms to a focused profiling on specific niches and at the same time more tailored to a diversity of local contexts (moving away from the mega-fairs in huge halls, to studios and workshops in the city). A collective approach to promotion and relationship development in the transnational context remains necessary, but at the same time there is a need for a more flexible approach with consideration for specific niche practices that can sometimes be highly distinctive at the international level.

Fourth, we find that support for collective practice and practice development are still important, but the system of the different intermediary organisations supporting their subsectors in their international contexts varies to a significant extent. Their missions are defined differently. For instance, not all sectors have a “steunpunt”, a sectoral centre of expertise, focusing on research and professional development – also with regards to the international dimension. Concretely, the funds for the audiovisual sector and for literature fund and promote projects, but they are less equipped to think and work from an ecosystem approach. The collective mission of Flanders Architecture Institute and Flanders DC (Flemish design and fashion centre) within this framework only focuses on international promotion, and less on sectoral research and professional development. The mission of the nine amateur arts umbrella organisations has recently been strengthened, to be more active on the international front.

Fifth, we can see once again that interplay between capacity building and collective promotion is essential enough. Creating exposure (both for individual actors, and collectively) is a drop in the ocean if these actors have neither the competencies nor the capacity to seize the (subsequent) opportunities and translate them into a more strategic approach. Joint promotion is not enough if the actors in the field do not have sufficient capacity and competencies (specific knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, knowledge of the field, strategic insight) to further develop themselves in the international networks and ecosystems. For example, translating a novel, playing a showcase or pitching work at a matchmaking event creates visibility and opportunities, but these cannot be seized on if the individuals receiving support do not have the knowledge or time to capitalise on these contacts and translate them into sales, contracts or some other return on investment.

Finally, we note that international promotion will have more impact if there is better insight into the potential international demand. It became clear from this study how much the supply-oriented approach predominates (what Flemish actors bring to the international arena) and how little thought is given to potential foreign need or demand that could be anticipated on or fired up. This point came up occasionally, for example with a music manager who wanted to use more streaming data to identify opportunities or a literary publisher who stated that when taking on a translation project and the associated publication, potential demand from the market is more important than a translation subsidy.

Moreover, 'the' potential international demand obviously depends on a range of diverse factors, and Flemish actors and the Flemish International Cultural Policy can only *control* this to a limited extent. For example, the market for Flemish dance, theatre or circus productions abroad depends also on the purchasing power of the venues abroad, for example, in the case of buy-out fees for performing arts productions. This purchasing power is often a consequence of choices within the cultural policy of the 'receiving' country and the broader economic



context, but also depends on taste, customs, (language) barriers or whether people are open to new ideas or programmes in that specific country.⁴

We note also that the demand, supply and cultural context among audiences and communities and producers in Flanders and Brussels is changing. Some of these “new” producers develop their own networks and spaces. Some established cultural organisations (intend to) anticipate or respond to these changes. However, the current policy of promoting the use of Dutch hinders or even rules out the use of other languages. Some organisations state that this makes it difficult for them to capitalise on the ever-increasing international demand, from within Flanders/Belgium. There is a clear demand to support the international perspective more strongly and explicitly in Flanders and Brussels itself - de facto an international mental space – within the current strategic framework.

2.3.2 Working towards systemic change

In addition to the above, there are voices that more fundamentally call into question the acceleration and competitiveness within the current cultural ecosystems. This has prompted various initiatives aimed at systemic change towards an international approach that is more sustainable in the longer term. When talking about sustainability, cultural, social, personal, economic and environmental considerations come into play.

We have already discussed the competitiveness and acceleration within transnational value networks and ecosystems, and the need for change and innovation. We observe a desire to work towards a more fundamental change in which there is cooperation and slowing down instead, moving towards processes with a long-term perspective. Or to a situation that is more sustainable in the longer term in the economic, ecological, social and human arena. Within this vision, there would be sufficient time and space in transnational cultural ecosystems for artistic and cultural development, for the renewal and sustainable development of relationships, and for sustainable economic models based on the principles of solidarity and sharing, rather than competition and a winner-takes-all mentality.⁵

Such a fair new world is by no means a reality today, but the vision exists and is becoming more clearly articulated. Within just about all sectors, we see interesting experiments - both locally and in an international context - into fair practice, caring and inclusive international work, environmental sustainability and alternative ecological models, as well as more focus on diversity and sustainable digital transformations. This includes different practices within the sector itself (e.g. slow touring within music) and cultural and creative approaches that contribute to a more sustainable society. For example, interdisciplinary and international laboratories are particularly active in the fields of design, architecture or socio-cultural work where, innovative approaches are being developed for solving societal issues to enable a transition to a more sustainable and just society. Architecture can be a “flywheel” for social innovation. ‘Design thinking’ is also used as a method to approach

⁴ See also [Perform Europe Results of the Mapping and Analysis.pdf \(ietm.org\)](#), p. 35 et seq. Opportunities to perform in the Netherlands fell due to the specific preconditions and the way theatres and companies are organised, and by extension Dutch cultural policy. One noteworthy example is the success of contemporary Flemish performing arts in France in recent decades. This interest arose in the 1980s, when there was not yet any Flemish International Cultural Policy, not even a policy for the Flemish performing arts. The fact that Flemish companies had such strong ties is more the result of French cultural policy, as performance venues have deep pockets there, and an import agency (ONDA) actively supported Flemish companies to have a more international programme. In a changing context, many French programme curators no longer look to the North, but to the South, to the Mediterranean region. The opportunities for Flemish productions are getting few and far between as a result. This is not something the Flemish Cultural Policy can easily control.

⁵ This closely resembles a so-called doughnut – see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doughnut_\(economic_model\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doughnut_(economic_model)) - approach to working transnationally, whereby artists capitalise on the content-related added value and potential of international work, while respecting human, social and environmental boundaries. This means: caring international work, respecting principles of fair practice (both with respect to the actors in Flanders and Brussels themselves, as well as equal and fair relations within an international situation where the starting point is by definition not the same), with diverse opinions and inclusive, and taking into account limitations in terms of environmental sustainability. For an example from the cultural sector, see <https://amsterdamdonutcoalitie.nl/projecten>.



broader social issues (in the context of social transitions in the areas of energy, material use, circular economy, etc.). Social-cultural work in Flanders offers a framework in which civil actors (citizens, associations, etc.) commit to specific themes to work on the transition to a more sustainable and socially just society.

Our changing society faces major issues, and these are not limited to national borders. These experiments are therefore taking place in an international context of European projects, networks and consortia. It is important to note that sustainability considerations are increasingly decisive for the selections made at major international institutions, festivals, biennials, venues and other platforms. We give two examples. First, at international performance venues such as arts and music festivals, gender equality, ethnic-cultural diversity and other forms of diversity increasingly play a role as a touchstone for the programme as a whole and the offering - based on individual convictions but also because audiences have become much more attuned to it. As such, more room has been made within international programmes for voices and perspectives that were previously overlooked. Second, on many international performance platforms, there has been a shift of focus away from creators, productions and oeuvres to a more thematic approach that looks at social issues through a cultural lens. This is very much visible within sectors such as design and architecture, but also within the visual arts or performing arts. For Flanders, this presents opportunities, as there are many cultural and creative practices here that address sustainability issues in a distinctive way internationally. It is also a strength of a number of sectoral policy frameworks - in particular the Decree on Social-Cultural Work and the Arts Decree - that they strongly encourage innovation from the bottom up.

2.4. The gap between transnational practice and international cultural policy

The fact that a Strategic Framework was introduced from various policy areas and government bodies involved, is a breakthrough in the history of Flemish (cultural) policy. This framework defines several principles and starts from a 'follow-the-actor' approach where initiatives are developed in a sectoral context (funds, sectoral decrees) to promote the international visibility and networking of cultural goods and practices. Complementing this sectoral basis are instruments that contribute to the visibility of actors and goods, and - more generally - the image of Flanders abroad. On the one hand there is a focus, on geographic regions, and on the other hand on ensuring complementarity and cooperation between the competent government bodies (DCYM, Flanders Chancellery & Foreign Office, FIT, VISITFLANDERS) and the cultural intermediary organisations (sectoral support centres, funds...). The framework is in effect for the period 2021-2025.

While the international context of cultural ecosystems is characterised by an increasing volatility, a so-called 'gap analysis' was prepared for this research. The developments and needs discussed above were compared in 2023 with the current Strategic Framework for ICP (and the way in which it is being implemented today). We note that there are various tensions, between international practice and current policy, and between the Strategic Framework and how this is put into practice.

First, considering the changing context, there is a need to update some of the principles and starting points. For example, the Strategic Framework has a strong focus on activities abroad, while the international aspect also plays a strong role in Flanders itself. Moreover, the current Flemish ICP still capitalises too little on themes that are urgent in various Flemish sectors and have international importance, and often also play a significant role in (international) cultural policy in other countries, such as sustainability, diversity, fair practice, care, etc. In other countries and a European context, there is increasing policy recognition that these themes are important prerequisites of a sustainable international cultural policy.



Second, there is a gap between the 'Strategic Framework' and the practice of international cultural policy. It is striking that although the policy framework purports to be strongly export-oriented, respondents indicate that the current policy does not respond flexibly or adaptively enough to (sector-specific) changing environmental factors, including in Flanders itself. The follow-the-actor principle gives a lot of room for Flemish actors to set their own course at the international level, but there are few incentives for innovation in this area. The bottom-up approach may unintentionally reinforce a strong supply-oriented approach with relatively little regard for the potential international demand side.

Third, there is a need for a long-term perspective. There is a frustration that an international presence and visibility is too much a case of 'hit & run': to briefly present but with no lasting impact. The resources are often lacking for preparatory and overarching activities, or initiatives aimed at valorising a given opportunity and creating impact. There is a need for a long-term approach and the ICP implementation provides (too) little in the way of points of reference for this, as there is a prevailing project-based rationale, and choices are perceived as too ad hoc, and not transparent enough.

Fourth, the Strategic Framework does not (yet) provide direction for what happens on the ground. It has not been consequentially translated into a plan of action, tools and appropriate resources. There is also no vision, image or promising perspective of where the policy wants to be in five or six years or what results it wants to have achieved. This is the case for sector-specific approaches and for the overarching ICP. This means that opportunities are underutilised to make the Strategic Framework a guiding document. To strengthen the international visibility of the Flemish cultural sector at home and abroad, more intense cooperation and coordination between the various government bodies and sectoral intermediary organisations actors is a must.

Finally, there is a strong need for knowledge building and monitoring. There is very limited monitoring of international activities and policy efforts: this is primarily for the purpose of accounting for government spending, but there is barely any further analysis that enables (additional) policy development and makes it possible to anticipate opportunities. This is not only about monitoring the 'supply', but also detecting opportunities from the demand side.

2.5. Recommendations for Future International Cultural Policy

Above, we first outlined the added value and significance of international cultural exchange, both for the cultural and creative sectors and for the broader social context of which they are an intrinsic part. Developments in this social context are putting pressure on the capacity of cultural actors to unlock this potential, but they are also creating opportunities. They are not only challenging the way actors orient themselves internationally. The nature of international work itself has also fundamentally changed. A framing in which 'going international' is presented as a movement from inside to outside or vice versa, no longer covers and is not always appropriate to describe and understand a situation in which local and global, physical, hybrid and digital, are simultaneously developed, financed, produced, created and consumed. The value and meaning of working internationally has not radically changed in this regard for the sector and society, but the sectoral and societal context has shifted. This not only impacts how we work internationally and what happens on the ground - and the question of what the most appropriate strategies are. It calls for a response and even a repositioning of international cultural policy. This question is not only applicable in Flanders, but also in other countries and in transnational forums.



2.5.1 New approaches in other contexts

In what ways are other countries and other policy levels responding to the developments described above? What can we already learn from these considerations in other countries? We see a lot of different approaches. On the one hand, we see a strong protectionist reflex in countries and regions around us (see 2.2.1) and on the other hand we see that in other contexts there is a stronger focus on digitalisation, social connections and cooperation with other domains, sustainability, diversity and inclusion in cultural policy as well as international cultural policy.

This is the situation in various neighbouring countries, and therefore directly and indirectly determine the demand side. For example, Pro Helvetia institutes around the world were recently repositioned within a new global strategy. Their strategy is based on the principles of flexibility, adaptability and integrity. There is more focus within this strategy on the nuances of each specific context, the strengths and needs and cultural practices of the countries and regions targeted - leading to more diversified and flexible instruments, including continuous monitoring of artistic developments and geographical shifts, incentives to travel sustainably and targeted incentive subsidies.⁶ In the Dutch ICP, there has been a strong focus on potential demand abroad and what potential collaborations can be realised. The keywords are flexibility, adaptability, diversity and environmental sustainability.⁷

The reflections on more sustainable transnational work are also currently making headway within European cultural policy. On the one hand, European policy is focusing on digital transformation and sector-specific exports (e.g., within music). At the same time, there are also incentives for environmental sustainability, mental well-being and diversity and inclusion, which carry over into sectoral programmes such as Culture Moves Europe (formerly iPortunus), for example. At the European level, we see the potential of cultural ecosystems (especially architecture and design) for a broader societal transition. New European Bauhaus is the cultural arm within the European Green Deal. The whole framework around the European Capitals of Culture is designed to bring about longer-term cultural and broader societal transformations in the cities and across Europe, based on a cultural event.

In addition, there are various transnational non-profit and private funds that have been working on these themes for some time and are adapting the instruments accordingly, such as e.g. enabling transnational process funding in addition to project funding, such as the [European Cultural Foundation](#), [zusa](#), [mitost](#), [Drosos Foundation](#), etc.⁸ There are also interesting initiatives in the broader Mediterranean context around knowledge sharing and the fair redistribution of resources in contexts where there is no international cultural policy, or only a limited one (see [Culture Resource](#)).

2.5.2 Recommendations for a Future Flemish International Cultural Policy

The current, cross-policy area Strategic Framework International Cultural Policy is new to Flanders. At the same time, it remains strongly based on premises that have long been the foundations of international cultural policy. These correspond less and less to the transnational reality in the various subsectors and the complex, cross-border context in which they are deeply interwoven. This observation calls for a reassessment of the principles and objectives of the ICP and the strategies to achieve these objectives. In addition, there is a need for consistent

⁶ Pro Helvetia Global Strategy, November 2021.

⁷ [International Cultural Policy Framework 2021-2024 \(overheid.nl\)](#). In 2023, the Dutch ICP was reviewed with a view to further development in the coming years, but this has been delayed partly due to the recent fall of the Dutch government.

⁸ see also <https://profil-soziokultur.de/resilience-and-relevance/>



strategic translation, based on a long-term perspective. What principles can be the foundations of a future international cultural policy? How can objectives be reformulated? What strategic approaches can help achieve these objectives?

Overview of recommendations

In this final part of the synthesis chapter, we make recommendations for a future Flemish International Cultural Policy. Here we build on the 'points for improvement' that came up in the previously mentioned gap analysis (see: Chapter 5). The structure is as follows:

Basic principles

1. The positioning of Flemish sectoral and international cultural policy in transnational cultural ecosystems
2. The need for a flexible, adaptive and context-based strategy with a long-term perspective
3. Consideration for the local anchoring of these transnational ecosystems
4. Consideration for the value of and necessary preconditions for international exchange
5. Collaboration as the guiding principle

Objectives

1. Strengthen the position of Flemish actors in their international context
2. Incentivise the switch to a more sustainable international practice
3. Valorise the strengths of the Flemish cultural field within the broader Flemish policy

Process-related recommendations

1. From strategy to action
2. Investing in knowledge building
3. Collaboration in the practice of ICP

2.5.3 Basic principles

The 'basic principles' of the current Strategic Framework lay down the sectoral scope, situate the Flemish ICP within the European and multilateral policy context, place a strong emphasis on activities that take place 'abroad', and propose that the ICP should not only strengthen actors but also contribute more broadly to the international positioning and image of Flanders abroad. In light of the analyses outlined in this Field Drawing, the following recommendations for a future International Cultural Policy are put forward.



1. The positioning of Flemish sectoral and international cultural policy in transnational cultural ecosystems

The reality is that transnational ecosystems or value chains have emerged across cultural subsectors, increasingly characterised by complex system dynamics. These have caused volatility in recent years. We can expect that things will not be any calmer in the coming years, for example given the developments in artificial intelligence and the possible impact on cultural value chains. If we want to focus on strengthening Flemish actors in this context, it helps to realise how difficult – or even impossible – to manage these complex system dynamics. This applies to actors in the field, as well as the sectoral intermediary organisations players and government bodies.

There is a need to understand how transnational value chains work, what are the underlying drivers of flows of people, resources, products and services, and through which specific injections Flemish actors can be strengthened in this complex and volatile environment. On the one hand, this is a highly sector-specific story - and even subsector-specific, because even within sectors such as film, games, music, cultural heritage, performing arts, visual arts ... there are highly different dynamics in different subsectors and niches. On the other hand, within these different contexts there are sometimes very similar themes and challenges, which can also be approached jointly, such as the need for technological and social innovation.

This kind of development is very difficult to control, even by a cultural policy at the national/regional level. At the same time, the national/regional level also has a crucial role to play. This level is in a good position to take initiatives to strengthen Flemish actors within a (competitive) transnational sectoral context. International dynamics manifest themselves strongly at the local level, but at the local level it is difficult to develop sectoral policies. Furthermore, the developments described transcend national borders, but the principle of subsidiarity stipulates that cultural competences are in principle at the level of the member states and that the EU only undertakes initiatives that exceed the capacity of the member states. How important the national/regional level is in supporting players in the field can be further demonstrated by a comparison with regions and countries where there are no strong cultural policies (as can be found in the [Research results of Perform Europe - Perform Europe](#)).

On the one hand, there is an important role to be played by the Flemish (international) cultural policy; at the same time, it is important to be able to make a good assessment of the role that the Flemish government can 'only' play, within complex system dynamics that are difficult to manage. Within the current Flemish cultural and media policy, examples can be found of an approach that is strongly based on the current need to position Flemish actors within transnational ecosystems and value networks, which have their own dynamics. A first example is gaming policy, within the broader media policy. [Levelup](#), the vision paper and action plan on Flemish gaming policy, starts from the intention to strengthen Flemish actors in a global context, through a coherent framework of targeted injections intended to strengthen their position within it (investments in production and research and development, in cross-sectoral cooperation, information sharing and knowledge building). Of course, this is a broader sectoral strategy, and part of it is a specific international expansion action plan that focuses on international visibility. Another noteworthy example within cultural policy is the Flemish [policy vision on intangible heritage](#), developed together with WIE, Werkplaats Immaterieel Erfgoed (Flemish organisation for intangible heritage), which reinforces local practices within a transnational context (often also strongly determined by UNESCO).

These two examples may contain the seeds for developing a repositioning of Flemish international media and cultural policy. In both cases, there is a strategy that starts from smart insight into how Flemish cultural policy can provide targeted impulses to strengthen Flemish actors in a complex, transnational ecosystem. Furthermore, in both cases, there is a strategy development which emerged from a process of co-creation from the sectors and policy. This creates support from the outset. This may contain the seeds of an approach that can be rolled out



more broadly across sectors: a strong sectoral policy as the basis, within which the international dimension is incorporated and gives rise to specific, targeted interventions by a network of organisations.

2. The need for a flexible, adaptive and context-based strategy with a long-term perspective

The volatility of developments in transnational ecosystems accentuates the need for a flexible, adaptive, context-based and collaborative strategy. In this regard, there is, on the one hand, a need for a long-term perspective that goes beyond the project horizon and can take the form of structural engagements between the various partners involved. This is already an important principle in the Strategic Framework currently in place. At the same time, a highly volatile context also needs room for adjustment and adaptation to often rapidly changing environmental factors. This can take the form of an incentive policy that can give impulses to the exploration of specific themes or opportunities within specific geographical contexts. Screening and monitoring trends and developments within transnational cultural ecosystems as in specific relevant regions, are important to identify opportunities and challenges.

An adaptive approach means: the possibility to adapt to rapidly changing environmental factors. This therefore starts not only from what Flanders has to offer to the world, but also what is needed in what context and what meaningful interactions are possible. This is important from artistic, social and economic rationales. What does working internationally contribute to local artistic and cultural scenes and ecosystems? What does it contribute to local communities? Where is there a market for what?

3. Consideration for the local anchoring of these transnational ecosystems

The Strategic Framework emphasises Flanders' international presence and that remains important. However, working internationally is not only about movements from inside to outside and vice versa, but also about recognising the interdependence of local communities and transnational networks and value chains - both within culture and more broadly. Within the policy vision of the international cultural policy, a reassessment is needed that considers the international, superdiverse and multilingual reality of cultural and social life in Flanders and Brussels. Flanders and Brussels are - physically and mentally - an inherently international space.

Cities, municipalities and the supra-local policy level can be partners in this regard. Considering the (supra-)local anchoring and manifestation of transnational cultural ecosystems also means starting discussions with local governments (cities and municipalities) about international cultural policy and embedding the international dimension within supra-local cultural operations (already happening). Incentives can also be devised to enable local authorities and cultural regions to engage at the transnational levels (for example, through the candidacies for European Capitals of Culture).

4. Consideration for the value and necessary preconditions for international exchange

The Field Drawing of International Cultural Policy from Flanders opens with an explanation of the potential value and significance of working internationally for cultural actors and for the broader society. The sectoral and environmental analyses show that there are currently many forms of internationalisation that do not contribute to this but detract from this potential value. In the general debate on working internationally - as we reconstruct it in this study - it is striking how much importance is placed on social and environmental preconditions, precisely because more pressure is felt in these areas. Themes such as care, mental well-being, sustainability and inclusiveness are emerging and - although there are still big steps to take here in practice - these are also mainstreaming in international decision-making forums and policy frameworks. Within the principles of a future



international cultural policy, it can be made explicit that working internationally is not (only) valuable *in itself* (outsourcing production to low-wage environments, is a good counterexample here), but that it can contribute to artistic and social development, *on condition* that this involves a caring approach, with consideration for diverse opinions and equality in international relations, and within the limits of the planet. The operationalisation of the remaining framework should therefore make this possible.

5. Collaboration as the guiding principle

Making an impact within complex international system dynamics is only possible if there is collaboration. As is the case in the current Strategic Framework, collaboration and synergy among all actors involved must be the guiding principle. Collaboration can take shape at different levels: a) *within the sectors* between peers and players in the field, whereby funds and the sectoral support centres play a platform role, often in cooperation with counterparts from the Netherlands and French-speaking Belgium; b) between intermediary structures and government bodies within the International Cultural Policy, c) within bilateral partnerships and agreements; or d) in a complementary ICP that also forges links with the (supra)local and supranational policy levels.

It remains a unique and irreplaceable role for the Flemish policy level, together with colleagues from the other communities in Belgium, to continue working towards transnational decision-making frameworks, e.g. decision-making at the European level (European Cultural Policy, directives with an impact on the position of Flemish actors within the transnational ecosystems), within UNESCO, and the Council of Europe. The Flemish government can draw on the expertise, knowledge and networks of actors in the field, as is explicitly the case with initiatives in the area of intangible heritage.

2.5.4 Objectives framework for a future International Cultural Policy

The current Strategic Framework for ICP lays down three main objectives. First, it aims to (freely translated) "strengthen the international position of cultural actors, goods and practices," second, to "stimulate international cooperation, networking and exchange," and third, to "put Flanders in the world as an innovative State of the Art and driver of partnerships within a European value framework." When we re-examine these three objectives from the questions posed to policy from international cultural practice (see 2.3), they (unsurprisingly) align with the first two objectives. More than ever, there is a demand for support in a volatile international context, and more than ever, a network-based approach is relevant in this regard. Admittedly, chapter 2.3 shows that there are two underlying paradigmatic approaches. On the one hand, actors want to be able to compete and become visible in a transnational context ("A stronger, more competitive positioning and demand for 'export support'.2.3.1). On the other hand, they also want to move toward a more sustainable approach, which does more justice to the value and preconditions surrounding international work ('Working towards systemic change',2.3.2). This insight can be the basis of a forward-looking reformulating of the objectives of a forward-looking policy toolkit, which on the one hand is used to strengthen Flemish actors in a transnational context and on the other hand incentivises the transition to a more sustainable practice. ('Networking' of course remains essential but is a means to achieve both objectives. It therefore does not need to be retained as a separate objective).

In a sectoral survey, the third objective - contributing to the reach and international positioning of Flanders - sometimes receives less explicit attention. Actors in the field and the sectoral intermediary players rarely, if ever, see it as their primary role to position Flanders. Admittedly, this is (currently) a broader Flemish policy objective and is also the perspective from which resources from cultural diplomacy, tourism and economic policy are



mobilised, based on a more instrumental approach to culture. If this is still the approach in the future, then the material from this Field Drawing also opens up avenues for a new approach, based on a reformulation: the question is how the strengths of the broad cultural field can be capitalised on to increase the visibility of Flanders abroad.

In short, from this perspective, the future International Cultural Policy can be intended to create the conditions so that Flemish actors are strengthened and can sustainably work within this transnational context. On the one hand, by developing a stronger and more supported strategy for the International Cultural Policy with coherent and targeted interventions to strengthen the position of Flemish actors in an international sectoral context. On the other hand, by innovating, to encourage the shift to a more sustainable transnational practice. In addition, the Flemish government can valorise the strengths accumulated in the context of other and broader policy objectives, such as enhancing the reach of Flanders abroad. Below, we provide further explanation for these three reformulated objectives.

Objective 1: strengthen the position of Flemish actors in their international context

In 2.3.1, the needs for a stronger positioning of Flemish cultural actors in an international context were already discussed, which the future ICP - embedded in the broader Flemish cultural policy - can capitalise on. We translate these needs into an approach based on policy instruments.

- 1. The need for funding for international projects and processes** (both an easily accessible and flexible set of policy instruments, and the ability to scale up through more large-scale initiatives and projects or 'breakthroughs')

Within the ICP, there is a need for both easily accessible and flexible support tools, as well as the right tools to play on a larger scale as well. In this regard, the current Strategic Framework refers to the sector-specific context, the operations of funds and sectoral decrees. In the context of this Field Drawing of International Cultural Policy from Flanders, there was no evaluation of the sectoral decrees. We observe that the questions from the sectors are remarkably similar. A more focused evaluation of the sectoral decrees may give rise to fine-tuning of the current instruments.

As a general point, we note that a solid context for internationalising cultural ecosystems needs more than project funding in the context of the ICP, and therefore touches on broader sectoral policies, of which the international dimension is an integral part. Sector-specific landscape care and multi-year operational subsidies are essential. In most sectors, there are approaches that not only work internationally in the longer term through multi-annual instruments, but also indirectly create a context in which upcoming talent can develop initial international opportunities (see for example the key role of residencies, workshops, circus ateliers, etc.). At the same time, it is advisable to allocate resources not only to the established institutions and sufficient resources for open calls, scholarships and project subsidies, etc., not only for projects and collaborative processes taking place abroad, but also for projects that can make Flanders an open, hospitable and welcoming international place, f.e. [Shifting Places, support for cultural practitioners who have fled to Switzerland](#) (Pro Helvetia).

- 2. A toolkit for collective promotion, network development and support for practice.**

Funds, sectoral support centres and other intermediaries can collectively respond to several needs by sharing knowledge and networks. On the one hand, they are close to the sectors involved and, on the other, they are also a point of contact for stakeholders in Belgium and abroad (Flemish government bodies, international stakeholders). It is clearly an asset for the Flemish International Cultural Policy that there is (still) a system of



funds and sectoral institutes that plays an intermediary role between the culture field and cultural policy. Flanders is one of the few regions where the system of intermediary organisations has been relatively well preserved, even though there have been sharp cutbacks in the last 10 to 15 years that have not been reinstated everywhere. As a result, we do observe gaps and a non-level playing field. The sectoral support centres have different tools at their disposal. The other sectoral intermediary organisations (funds, sector institutes) have a remit that focuses primarily on funding and promotion, and less on developing practice from an ecosystem approach. This aspect is further elaborated in ongoing research by IDEA Consult, a spending review of the system of cultural intermediary organisations, within which support for internationalisation is a theme.

The sectoral intermediary organisations (obviously) work on a sectoral basis, but for a number of aspects it is advisable to collaborate, for example in terms of referrals to European programmes and subsidy possibilities, not only within the system of intermediary structures but also more broadly (Creative Europe Desks, Liaison agency Flanders-Europe (VLEVA)).

3. Sufficient capacity and competencies in strategic international entrepreneurship, for the cultural actors themselves to be able to capitalise on the opportunities that present themselves.

As indicated above, it is essential for all subsectors that actors in the field have sufficient support, capacity and competencies themselves to develop their own initiatives. This is beyond the scope of the international cultural policy. It is part of the broader sectoral cultural policy but is an important condition for achieving Objective 1.

4. Room for innovation, both content-cultural and in terms of business models and promotional approaches.

As indicated above, in a volatile context, there is intense pressure on the tried-and-tested recipes for focusing on visibility and attention in transnational networks and mobilising the necessary resources. Focusing on experimentation and innovation is therefore necessary to remain relevant in the longer term. This is a need felt by both actors in the field and sectoral intermediary players. The ICP can create a context in which joint research and development and knowledge sharing becomes possible, for example via project calls on specific themes, combined with monitoring, evaluation and shared learning.

Objective 2: incentivise the switch to a more sustainable international practice

For many cultural actors, economic motives, profiling and the need for visibility, performance opportunities and income are not the primary motivation for working internationally. Rather, they are concerned with the content-related, cultural added value of international exchange for all parties involved: creators, audiences and all possible intermediaries. On the one hand, current developments in international networks and ecosystems significantly jeopardise this added value of working internationally. Hence the need for system innovation regarding more sustainable approaches to working internationally. Various reflections, debates and practical experiments in this area are taking place in international forums and actors based in Flanders are also active in this field. As touched upon in 2.3.2, many actors - especially within design, architecture, and socio-cultural work, but also within the arts and cultural heritage - are exploring how they can contribute with their artistic, cultural, and creative practice to addressing broader societal issues of sustainability. There is a need within the ICP for a flexible and adaptive framework that incentivises and capitalises on various aspects of sustainable innovation. Various countries are switching from a generic approach for this reason, to international impulse programmes that focus on specific



themes, such as digital transformation, environmental sustainability or inclusivity. See, for example, [New models of collaboration - Culture and Business - Pro Helvetia](#), as well as the [innovation labs](#) in the Netherlands.

In what ways can the future ICP provide incentives for the shift to a more sustainable international practice? We observe that in the current situation in Flanders - in the sectors and by the sectoral intermediary organisations - there are already various initiatives engaging with the question of sustainability, in a broader sense than purely ecological aspects: fair practice in an international context, working internationally with inclusivity and diverse opinions, culture and conflict, gender equality, environmental sustainability, digital transformation and technological innovation, new economic models, etc. In short, there are opportunities here for collaboration, knowledge sharing and joint learning on shared themes that are common to all sectors.

This may be an approach in which the DCYM and the various sectoral intermediary organisations together create a shared learning environment around shared challenges, in the process setting strategic priorities together. Within this impulse policy, there should ideally be the following:

1. Space for **innovation and experimentation**, pilots and “living labs” (with decent financial support and guidance, not only for projects but also for processes).
2. Space for **connecting and evaluating** these experiments in **shared learning pathways**.
3. Scope for **building up new skills in sustainable international work**. New ways of working require new skills. For example, provide room for high-quality training and guidance, mentoring, etc., within an international context.⁹ Develop an individual offering within the ICP and facilitate travelling for the purpose of learning. What is learned during experiments and pilots can be documented, analysed, thought through, both within the cultural ecosystems and the framework of the Flemish ICP.

2.5.4.1 Objective 3: valorise the strengths of the Flemish cultural field within the broader Flemish policy

If the position of Flemish actors has been strengthened, and if they have been empowered to organise their international cultural practice more sustainably, then opportunities also arise to respond to and valorise these cultural assets and strengths in the context of broader Flemish policy objectives. The idea is to present and valorise the strengths of the Flemish cultural field with more emphasis, from an international perspective and within the broader objectives of the Flemish government policy: both from the standpoint of culture and media policy; foreign policy (positioning Flanders internationally through culture), tourism policy (positioning Flanders as a thriving destination, rich in culture and heritage) and economic policy (contributing to the economic prosperity of Flanders). The more the (international) cultural policy can strengthen the sector, the more opportunities to use these strengths 'instrumentally' within the broader Flemish policy.

The following focus points are important:

1. Flanders as 'State of the Art' and pioneer in sustainable innovation

As a 'State of the Art' (a brand used in the strategy of the Flemish government and some of its agencies), Flanders clearly has a lot to offer the world. As such, cultural diplomacy currently highlights excellence and assets in the

⁹ There are interesting experiments in this regard, for example, where mentors from around the world work online with cultural actors in Germany, the Netherlands or Flanders (see, e.g., Revision X). See also the international discussions between private and public funders, where, in addition to process funding, there was a lot of focus on listening more to the grantee, facilitating more mentoring and capacity building, including cross-border and cross-sectoral: <https://profil-soziokultur.de/resilience-and-relevance/>



various art forms and cultural heritage. Of course, these efforts can be perpetuated. The 'usual vehicles' for cultural diplomacy (the arts or heritage, e.g. the Flemish masters) also remain important and relevant. However, this Field Drawing - and the strengths we have identified within the various cultural ecosystems - offers leads for presenting the visibility of Flanders in an unusual way than purely based on the excellence of specific products, names and oeuvres. There are strong and innovative processes and practices in various subsectors, with the arts, culture and creativity proving to be an engine for inspiring and interdisciplinary approaches to broader social issues. A good example is the 'Flemish wave' in architecture, which is surfing the international trend toward a more societal approach. Many cities have already made the shift in their city branding from a profile based on large-scale, showy architecture to an alternative approach that focuses primarily on the liveability aspect. This is where Flanders has unique strengths and assets. The approach is also consistent with a tourism profile as a thriving destination.

2. Reassess the interpretation of bilateral cultural relations (interregional and international) and geographical focus areas.

Focus countries of course provide a direction for choices to be made, and in practice, some of these focus countries are also still privileged partners. The question is whether and how this geographical approach is sustainable and desirable for the future, especially in a transnational and more hybrid context (physical/digital). Several countries have since abandoned this approach, but according to the comparative (p. 21), the Netherlands is not one of them (for now).

How is bilateral cooperation and working with focus regions relevant in a transnational context? In light of the above-mentioned basic principles, there are significant opportunities. Based on the need for a long-term perspective and a context-based approach, it is and will continue to be a great asset for the ICP if a link can be made with the foreign delegations (which focus on cultural diplomacy, tourism, economic policy), who can be a solid anchor points in specific contexts. Based on the need for project funding and thematic incentives, there is a need for specific calls that encourage collaboration between actors from two regions or countries which can be instrumental to explore trends and shifts in these contexts. Rather than a more general focus on the bilateral interaction between the cultural sectors from one country (or region) and the other, there is a need for a more targeted, tailored approach that a) considers and explores the context specificity of both countries/regions b) a strategic analysis of what the specific, mutual needs and strengths of both countries/regions are, both nationally and in terms of their embedding in transnational ecosystems, c) translating this strategic analysis into a plan of action.

3. A Flemish network abroad

Within this framework, good collaboration with and between the foreign delegations, FIT and VISITFLANDERS and cultural intermediary players is interesting. This is important to look together for opportunities and a targeted approach with impact on the ground, and a long-term perspective on building knowledge and networks.

Furthermore, there could still be room for programmes that encourage bilateral exchange but not necessarily (anymore) through bilateral agreements between countries or regions. This can also be between intermediary players and funds among themselves, for example. Also, for joint positioning on international platforms (e.g. with the French Community or the Netherlands), where it is most impactful, these forms of cooperation are already commonplace. For example, in the more language-specific disciplines, joint positioning with the Netherlands is an advisable approach, but can be further explored in other contexts.



2.5.5 Process-related recommendations

Finally, there are several points for improvement related to the way in which the Strategic Framework is put into practice. A stronger translation of strategy into action and a new impetus for collaboration among all actors involved is called for.

2.5.5.1 From strategy to action

In the future, a robust strategy development and implementation process is needed that provides long-term direction for the actions of the intermediary structures and government agencies but is also flexible enough to respond to rapidly changing environmental factors.

The building blocks for this strategy include:

- ▶ An environmental and field analysis of the cultural ecosystems, considering sectoral and societal changes, as a starting point.
- ▶ Defining policy options, objectives and priorities in consultation with various stakeholders, informed in part by sectoral and policy considerations.
- ▶ Developing a mission, value framework and a specific future vision for working internationally, with a focus on interdependence in a global cultural ecology.
- ▶ Translating the strategic framework into specific lines of action, including evaluation, adapting the toolkit and envisioning adequate resources and staff capacity.

2.5.5.2 Investing in knowledge building

Invest in monitoring and knowledge building regarding the international dimension of cultural ecosystems. There is a need for a long-term process to consistently monitor the internationalisation of cultural ecosystems. This process must identify trends in the field and evaluate the effects of current international cultural policies.

The monitoring process must be both quantitative and qualitative. Systematically tracking and analysing key figures on internationalisation is important but given the shifts in working within cultural ecosystems and the need for an adaptive approach, the process also needs to be approached as a learning process in which this changing environment is screened and the lessons learned about the effectiveness of different approaches is monitored. This includes a continual cycle of initiative, experimentation, collective evaluation and fine-tuning, with the central question of how stakeholders can together maximize the cultural and social potential of international work.

To achieve this, a clear mandate, division of roles and capacity for knowledge building are essential. Promoting evidence-based international cultural policy requires investment in both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, with a long-term perspective. There is also a need for experimentation and research in data collection and analysis, with a specific focus on the use of data from digital platforms and social media.

2.5.5.3 Collaboration in the practice of ICP

As stated above, cooperation must be the guiding principle in implementing International Cultural Policy. In this regard, the way in which cooperation and coordination is currently organised between different government bodies clearly needs to be looked at. Even though the Strategic Framework encourages *complementary*



collaboration, the current, non-committal networking model is falling short, for several reasons. The current approach is network-based, whereby the actors in question are given a strategic framework, and interpret this framework relatively autonomously based on their core tasks. As these core tasks differ, there is a 'complementary' approach. It is not clear in what way there is an interaction between the Strategic Framework and the specific practice/approach of the actors involved. This interaction appears to be minimal or even non-existent. At the same time, the need for cooperation and coordination is identified and put forward from all angles.

In a context in which, on the one hand, many initiatives have fallen away and, on the other, the need for coordination and urgency is greater than ever, there is a need for a new impetus for coordination and cooperation between intermediary bodies and government actors (including regional and urban) in the field of international cultural policy. This involves collaboration on both strategy development and implementation. The above-mentioned ideas require both bilateral and joint consultation, both coordination within the system of intermediary organisations (between sectoral support centres and funds), and within government bodies (mutual consultation between DCYM, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, FIT and VISITFLANDERS), based on clear guidance (perhaps a role for DCYM to coordinate consultation and strategy development). We refer again to the ongoing spending review regarding the cultural intermediary organisations, where collaboration and coordination are of course key concerns.

1. Sufficient capacity

One prerequisite is sufficient capacity, both in personnel and resources, to support complementary, overarching, and complementary international cultural policies, among all stakeholders. The Flemish diplomatic representation abroad, and representations in other policy areas such as tourism and economy, also need more capacity to seize opportunities within the ICP framework, with a focus on network development and joint projects. In addition, sufficient operating funds are needed, in addition to the sector-specific toolkit, to provide targeted incentives for a more integrally developed and concretely implemented international cultural policy. This also serves to leverage collaboration with other sectors and policy areas.

2. A stronger guiding role or a stronger actor

It is essential to have an actor who can proactively play a coordinating and guiding role in International Cultural Policy. This includes tasks such as implementing the ICP, policy development, coordination and regular communication with all stakeholders (actors in the field, the intermediary organisations, government bodies), as well as participation in relevant international policy networks for knowledge sharing. Moreover, within the DCYM, internal coordination between teams/staff with sectoral assignments (and Media) and the International Policy Team is essential. In addition to more active government direction, the ICP could benefit from a proactive "quartermaster" for international cultural policy - to achieve clear direction and shared vision development in cocreation with the various stakeholders, with room for cross-sectoral and cross-sectoral networking.

This alignment/coordination can be achieved with different levels of ambition. In other words, the current approach is a non-committal network approach. Other working models and organisational forms for developing, implementing and monitoring International Cultural Policy are conceivable. What about the idea of, in addition to sectoral support, appointing a stronger actor who, similar to Dutch Culture (supported by the departments of Culture and Foreign Affairs), brings together a number of sectoral and cross-sectoral tasks and is responsible for all of them? The precise form this work package will take needs to be further explored, in consultation with the various parties involved, but the following are definitely possibilities: joint knowledge building and monitoring of developments and needs in coordination with the intermediary organisations; a supply of transnational and



European knowledge and expertise from inside and outside the cultural and creative sectors with regard to international work (thematic, focus countries, digital transformation, sustainability), and in relation to the complementary partners in Flanders and around the world and with foreign delegations, possibly the development of more large-scale focus programmes.

This can be explored in more detail. A strong actor would work across sectors and in relation to other areas and would not be an 'export agency'. Indeed, the role would involve the whole complex of international work; to and in foreign countries, in Flanders as well and in digital/hybrid and transnational spaces. (See also [the comparative study of the University of Antwerp](#) on the ICP, p. 22¹⁰) The EventFlanders model may also be interesting for inspiration. In this case, there is a clear operational framework (embedded in VISITFLANDERS), with a steering committee with representation from different policy areas (in this case also Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, Sport Vlaanderen for sports, DCYM).

¹⁰ University of Antwerp, [Comparatief onderzoek Internationaal Cultuurbeleid: Overzicht algemene tendensen en modellen](#)



3 / The internationalisation of cultural practice

In this chapter we look into more detail at the current developments in the field of international work in the various subsectors, or cultural ecosystems, within the scope of international cultural policy. Who works internationally, and where? What are the main trends, developments and needs in terms of internationalising the cultural sectors in Flanders? This chapter collates sectoral insights into more general analyses, obtained by summarising the sectoral analyses (included in the annexes, available only in Dutch).

The main sub-questions that help answer Research Question 1 (see introduction) are addressed in four subchapters:

- ▶ Who is involved in what (type of) international activities and where do they take place (§3.3.1)?
- ▶ Where is the value and significance of working internationally for cultural actors and sectors and the broader social context? §3.3.2)
- ▶ What are the main trends and developments in the internationalisation of different cultural ecosystems? (§3.3.3)
- ▶ What is needed to capitalise on and/or further develop this potential in any case? (§3.3.4)

Based on extensive desk research by subsector, interviews with cultural intermediary organisations and focus groups with various actors in the field, the answers to these questions were first examined from a sector-specific perspective. The results can be found in the sectoral analyses in the annexes (in Dutch only). In the following subchapter 3, based on these sector analyses, we present a synthesis for the broader cultural field.

3.1. Who, what and where?

3.1.1 International puzzle pieces and patterns

In the broad field of culture, who develops what, and what forms and types of international work, and where? With the knowledge base at hand, the answer to this question is difficult to substantiate empirically. For most - in fact just about all - Flemish cultural ecosystems, there is no continuous data collection and up-to-date analyses that shed light on international activities in the various subsectors and developments in this area. Nevertheless, despite the lack of an up-to-date and robust empirical basis, there are - based on partial insights through desk research, the interviews with intermediary players and focus groups with actors in the field - relevant insights to impart as regards this sub-question.

To start with, we observe that there are significant differences between and within different subsectors, where rationales and value chains can differ to a large extent from one another. In some ecosystems, there is little to no 'local sector', in the first instance these are transnational and global (or at least Western) networks and ecosystems. As such, there isn't really a Flemish games sector; rather, Flemish actors and companies are players in a global ecosystem and [Flemish games policy](#) aims to provide incentives to strengthen Flemish actors in this transnational, highly competitive market environment. The same applies, mutatis mutandis, to a significant portion of the audiovisual sector. The idea that e.g. producing purely Flemish-made art-house films for a purely Flemish market is unthinkable. The production and distribution of these films is, by definition, transnational - and here too, Flemish audiovisual policy is intended to support local actors (and enable local content). Most



festivals have international programming. Most of the distributors active in Flanders distribute films in different countries (e.g. Benelux setting).

The situation is different within the amateur arts, where practice is strongly embedded at the local and regional levels, and working internationally usually means that local talent can demonstrate or hone their skills in an exchange with international peers. But here too, local talent these days is increasingly diverse and multilingual, the repertoire is often international, and locally anchored amateur artists also take on international themes and content.

We also see notable differences *within* different cultural ecosystems. Within the performing arts, for example, there are significant differences between disciplines. An easily accessible theatre monologue with a well-known actor does not necessarily have to cross borders. The same goes for the novice stand-up comedian who wants to make ends meet by combining gigs in bars with side jobs - or his more advanced colleague who combines runs in the Sportpaleis with TV appearances. But developing an ongoing - and by definition relatively short - career in contemporary dance without being active in a transnational network of residencies, workshops, arts centres, festivals, production houses and training programmes is in fact unthinkable. In dance, you are either international or not a dancer at all. Based on recent figures, the same seems to be the case for the circus arts. A recent survey by IDEA Consult shows that most circus artists (more than 85%) build international careers and that there are even Flemish circus artists who are active abroad but not in Flanders or Brussels (13.7%)¹¹.

In short, working internationally in the cultural sector can take highly diverse forms and guises. International work involves significant differences between and within different subsectors. Indeed, it is fair to say - viewed from the perspective of artists, musicians, authors, designers, makers and creatives - that every international story is unique and that the international development of actors, products and practices sometimes - if not always - follows unexpected and sometimes erratic paths, with ups and downs. At the same time, patterns can be discerned, in terms of who engages in what forms of international activities, beyond the uniqueness of all these individual careers and differences between sectors and subsectors.

Who is internationally active?

- ▶ Various **types of actors**: individuals such as artists, musicians, designers, architects, authors, translators, programmers, technicians, curators, conservators, professionals and enthusiasts; ad hoc partnerships with public institutions, associations, non-profit organisations and for-profit companies, various types of intermediaries (managers, agents, bookers), umbrella organisations, intermediary players, (supra) local, national or international networks or digital platforms, etc.
- ▶ These actors may **have highly diverse links to international work**: international work may be occasional or recurrent project-based in nature (e.g. occasionally participating in an international internship, occasional performances or shows abroad, a first translation of a novel), but may also be a structural part of an organisation's business model (see the previous example of Larian Studios, the co-production practice within audiovisual production or the contemporary performing arts) or even be inherently linked to an organisation's mission and remit (such as in socio-cultural work where Flemish chapters of international movements can be supported, or international arts festivals).

What types and forms of international work are deployed?

¹¹See [Sustainable careers of circus performers Final end report | Vlaanderen.be](#), p. 45)



- ▶ **Creation, (co-)production and co-financing:** artistic collaborations (creating together, performing, exchanging knowledge), pooling resources (financial, infrastructure, also via residencies, etc.); for the development of individual work, or services and work for hire.
- ▶ **Presentation and distribution:** can be aimed at various audiences (a broader public, showcasing for professionals or leveraging further market development), both 'export' and 'import'; both 'physical' presentations and distribution via digital platforms, streaming, downloads, etc.
- ▶ **Activities aimed at knowledge sharing and development:** residencies, fairs, networking, internships, working visits, visitor programmes, workshops, prospecting, etc., are aimed both at learning/knowledge exchange/ inspiration and network development; both content-related (e.g. artistic research), and development of craft/methodological know-how/professionalism.
- ▶ **Research, criticism and reflection:** journals, academic research units (e.g. architecture), archives and documentation, development of publications such as journals, artists' books, catalogues, handbooks, etc.
- ▶ **Education:** besides development-focused activities, we can highlight the importance of continuous formal education as an engine for internationalisation (dance, circus, fashion, etc.) both in Belgium (e.g. PARTS, HISK) and beyond (circus); they are international hubs and meeting places and also put students and alumni on an international path.

Where do these international activities take place?

- ▶ **Within Flanders and Brussels** in a local (urban, supra-local) context
 - International presentations, residencies, etc., aimed at incorporating foreign perspectives. Stages, festivals, art halls, arts centres, libraries, socio-cultural centres and museums present an international offering. Residencies attract international guests and bring them into contact with the local context. Associations and organisations attract international speakers and lecturers to Flanders and Brussels, etc.
 - At the same time, there is the inherently international aspect of our local communities in Flanders and Brussels. Both the cultural actors and also the target audience have a strong international background (e.g. related to the international nature of higher education, expats, EU staff, generations of labour migration whether or not related to cultural work, refugees, etc.) who are not always Dutch speaking.
- ▶ **Working internationally within Belgium: exchanges with French and German-speaking communities**
 - International cultural policy considers francophone and German-speaking Belgium to be 'international'. We gleaned from the interviews that Wallonia and the rest of Belgium in particular are not really seen as a 'foreign market'. There is not really a vibrant and thriving exchange between the two communities in many sectors. Even in Brussels, there appears to be a substantial boundary between the two communities. Most overlap and collaboration still appear to be in the circus arts, perhaps also because there is no Flemish higher training, it is Brussels-based. In the literary arts, Flirt Flamand is a project linking French- and Dutch-language literature, and there are examples in other subsectors.
 - In the area of joint international promotion, there are more examples of collaboration. Partnerships for joint profiling abroad for content-related/pragmatic motivations are more common among intermediary actors (e.g. Belgium Booms in music, Belgium is Design, etc.) and actors in the field (See [FESTIVAL EXPORT/IMPORT](#), a showcase festival by BRONKS and



La Montagne Magique theatre) and exchanges with federal umbrella organisations. Brussels will host [It Takes a City](#) in early 2024, a showcase of Brussels stage productions in collaboration with actors in the field and intermediary organisations from both communities.

- ▶ In many sectors, we see a **strong focus on neighbouring countries**: Netherlands, France, Germany and the UK.
 - This is because of the proximity and accessibility, but clearly also because Western European countries often have a strong international cultural policy or national institutes policy, and this can create interesting opportunities or resources (infrastructure, financing, performance possibilities, cooperation in terms of content, etc.).
 - In particular, the circus arts and performing arts have a strong focus on France, as there are (still) leading venues and festivals there with substantial budgets. According to the latest figures (pre-pandemic), two-thirds of Flemish circus performances are in France. France has been a bigger export country for the performing arts than the Netherlands for some time now, even though the Netherlands is/was traditionally the main market for the Flemish performing arts. Moreover, Belgium, and in practice especially Flanders and Brussels, is still one of the most important export countries for the Netherlands, especially in the performing arts (see the annual reviews of Dutch Culture, <https://dutchculture.nl/en/about-the-database>).
 - For the UK and partly also for Germany/German-speaking countries, this can be a springboard to other contexts and markets for specific sectors or niches. For example, within the literary arts, translation into English is crucial, as it can open doors to other language areas and other markets. There is a similar phenomenon, mutatis mutandis, as regards the importance of the Anglo-Saxon market (UK, but also USA) for international breakthroughs in pop/rock. Germany also partly plays a similar role, as a gateway to the German-speaking market and even beyond (for example, the major literary fairs, repertory theatre and stage literature, to a lesser extent also children's and youth theatre or again also pop and rock (Reeperbahn in Hamburg)). Most sectors and subsectors have similar sectoral hotspots, sometimes in neighbouring countries (Avignon) or also beyond (Milan, Venice, etc.).
 - In relation to the Netherlands, there is a specific situation with regard to literature and language-related disciplines and sectors, where various Flemish-Dutch institutions underpin bilateral government policies (e.g. De Brakke Grond, deBuren, the Taalunie - Union for the Dutch Language, Ons Erfdeel, etc.). There is a history of Flemish-Dutch exchange in many sectors, but this is now not always a matter of course. Take theatre, where decades after the 'Flemish wave', performance opportunities appeared to be decimated, but where interest does seem to be sparking up again (see also: Evelyne Coussens, [Tussen pragmatiek en romantiek: Vlaams-Nederlandse samenwerking in het theater](#)). A shift away from 'bilateral' Flemish-Dutch cooperation can clearly be seen here, with both countries moving towards a European and transnational environment. The joint initiatives of both Literature Funds (at book fairs) and other intermediary organisations are just some examples.

- ▶ Europe and the surrounding area
 - **European policy frameworks** create opportunities for exchange: Creative Europe and EUNIC but also other frameworks (European networks within cultural policy) and opportunities outside European Cultural Policy (e.g. Interreg, LEADER, Erasmus+, etc.).



- There is also **active engagement to the European approach** among many actors. Not only within the EU (e.g. cooperation with Central, Eastern Europe and the Balkan region), but in a changing geopolitical context there is also more attention to Europe's neighbours and the broader context (Middle East, North Africa, Ukraine, etc.)¹². What is notable about these reflections is that European engagement often goes hand in hand with a strongly critical attitude toward current European (cultural) policy. (e.g. the work of theatre-maker Thomas Bellinck, [Domo | Thomas Bellinck](#))

▶ Global

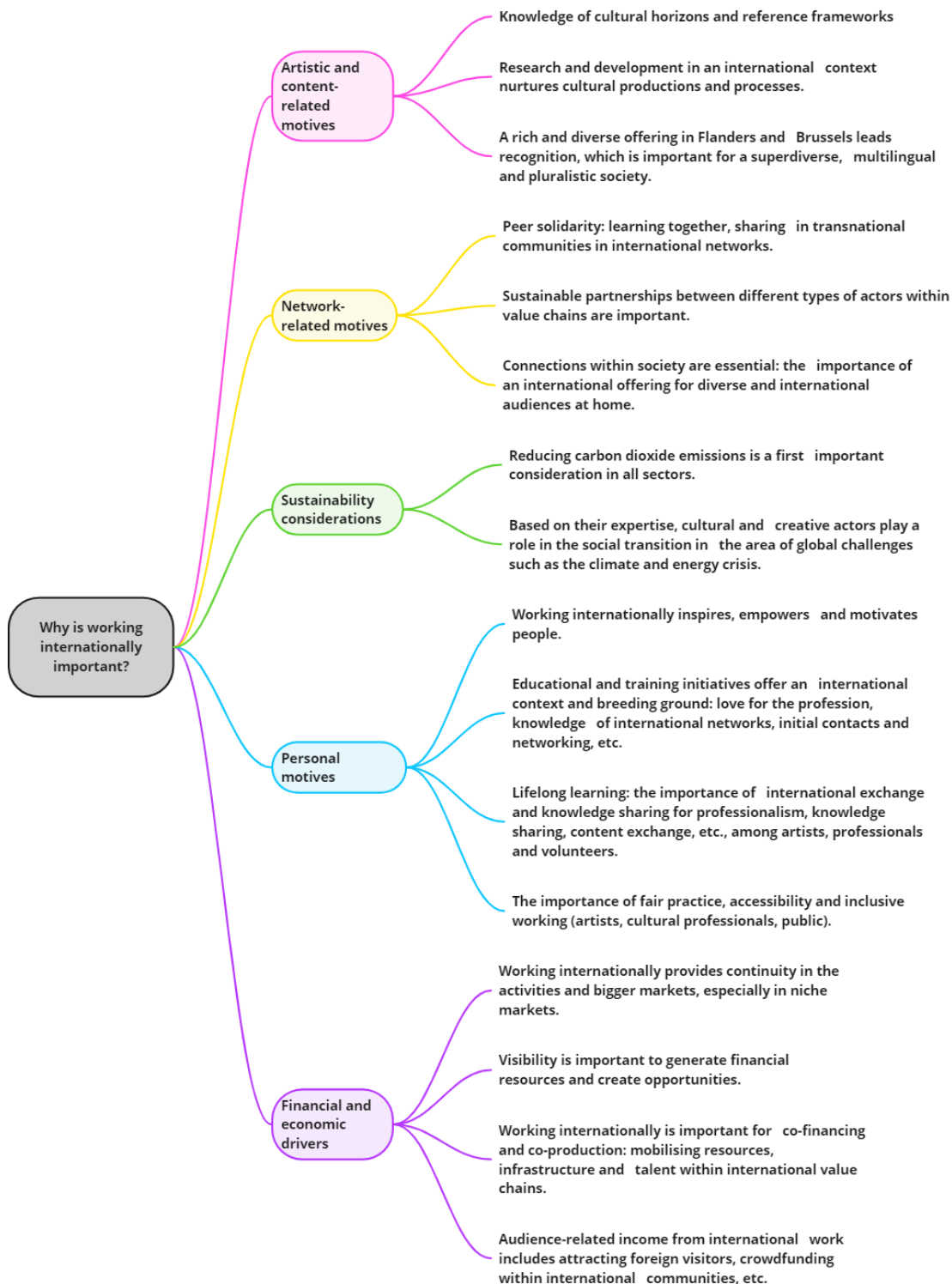
- Finally, for many cultural practices, it is in fact no longer possible to work out where they take place, 'here' or somewhere 'else' -especially in a digital context (games, online retail, streaming, etc.). Value chains and ecosystems are simultaneously hyperlocal and globalised, driven in part for digitalisation, but also by economic developments. See for example the outsourcing of production within design and also fashion - and as a counter-reaction to its not-so-sustainable aspects, also the increasing interest in short chains and re-shoring physical production.

3.2. Why is working internationally important?

Below we will now explore the underlying motivations of working internationally, focusing on the financial-economic, content-related, social, individual and ecological value of working internationally.

¹² See e.g. [Round table: Another Europe. More Europe | Flanders Arts Institute: this is the report of a roundtable in collaboration with the European Cultural Foundation, which plays an important role in terms of this form of solidarity and engagement](#) See also the article series by Hilde Teuchies in 2018 on cultural collaboration on the European commons. [Reclaiming the European Commons #1 | Flanders Arts Institute \(kunsten.be\)](#)





3.2.1 Artistic and content-related motives

- ▶ Artistic, cultural and content-related development is an important driver in having an international presence. Internationalisation nurtures the talent and career development of artists, authors, musicians, etc. (training, residencies, etc.). It leads to content-related and methodological practice development and



knowledge sharing for artists and creatives, for professionals and volunteers of organisations in all cultural sectors: arts, cultural heritage and socio-cultural work. Research and development in an international context nurtures cultural productions and processes.

In a globalised, networked society, international artistic exchange is an essential source of inspiration for artists and creative talent. Working internationally is empowering, mind-opening and enriching. The formats and frameworks within which it takes place can vary from sector to sector. Residencies are found in various sectors, especially within the arts and literature, and sometimes also within design: they offer time, space, sometimes exchange with local communities or access to specific equipment or apparatus. Certain formats are sector-specific. For circus artists, there is the participation in international conventions, meetings with workshops and master classes and performance periods, where they hone their artistic and technical skills. Within music, there are talent competitions (for fans) and songwriting camps. All these experiences contribute to both the artistic and career development of these artists. Indirectly, they also reinforce the development of economically sustainable careers.

Fostering practice development and knowledge sharing among both professionals and volunteers in organisations across all cultural sectors is also a key driver. Internationalisation strengthens content-related skills and encourages talent development and professionalism. Exchange of expertise enhances the competencies of workers within cultural organisations and therefore the cultural sectors as a whole. The intermediary actors (centres of expertise and funds) also strengthen their operations together with international counterparts.

This is important in all cultural ecosystems. In the socio-cultural sector - among actors in civil society - this motivation is one of the most important. While their specific practices have a strong local anchoring, they work on themes of international interest, and international exchange makes a significant contribution to the content-related enrichment of the practices of professionals and volunteers. The importance of international interaction for knowledge sharing and professionalism is also one of the main drivers within the cultural heritage domain. Experimenting, learning from each other's experiences and developing networks are crucial from the perspective of social and societal transition.

Basic and applied artistic research, creation and co-production, as well as collaborative design and creation, are a source of innovation - and an international context helps in this regard. International exchange brings together essential content-related skills and resources, with the goal of developing innovative artistic creations, innovative design or innovative approaches to cultural and social issues. Specific productions or processes sometimes require highly specific expertise, and it is crucial that this can be pooled internationally and with an interdisciplinary approach.

- ▶ **Cultural horizons and frames of reference are de facto international: to be active at the international level, it is essential to be familiar with discourses, practices, debates, customs within the history of international cultural communities. This is important in order to 'measure up to the international standard', to play a meaningful role, to be distinctive and therefore (possibly) lead the way.**

The importance of these frames of reference was identified as essential for artists and cultural actors in all sectors. In many cultural ecosystems, leading debates take place within an international horizon. The conversation and discourse on the visual arts takes place mainly at the international level, where institutional centres of power are (also) located outside Flanders and Brussels. Actors in Flanders and Brussels need to relate to this international dynamic. Continually testing individual practice against the prevailing ideas in the international art



system is essential. This context nurtures practices: working internationally provides an opportunity to test the ideas of artists and cultural institutions against external, non-Flemish and non-Brussels contexts.

The desire to compete at the international level or have an influence plays a significant role. The Vision Paper from 2016, *Volop inzetten op musea* by the Flemish Institution for Cultural Heritage, explicitly outlines the importance of working internationally (freely translated): 'Internationalisation is necessary to keep our own standards and quality requirements as high as possible, to keep measuring ourselves against what is going on elsewhere and to keep challenging ourselves to build exciting collections and presentations...It is also a question of conceiving of the museum institution in an international framework, in other words, transcending Flanders as a frame of reference.' (2016, p.32) A prominent position within international networks or decision-making bodies or having the resources to take part in international co-productions, can be important in this regard.

Within various disciplines, including the music sector, for example, there is a strong competitive arena at the international level, with many producers and productions and a large supply. As such, it is crucial for artists to have a distinctive act or product.

In just about all sectors, the important decision-making platforms are in other countries. But at the same time, for example in the film industry, although Belgian festivals do not have the same size or prestige as major international film festivals such as Berlin, Cannes, Rotterdam or Venice, Flemish films and festivals can still have an international reach. Many festivals specifically focus on niches (a particular genre or theme or form, etc.) and have a strong international reputation in this area. Other examples include the post-rock festival Dunk!Festival or COLLECTIBLE, the fair for collectible design ([Flanders DC - How collectible design is slowly but surely taking its place](#)). These are hot spots in specific niches, alongside established names such as Festival van Vlaanderen or KunstenfestivaldesArts.

In various subsectors - architecture, contemporary dance, the performing arts for children and young people, circus, intangible heritage, etc. - there is evidence that Flanders and Brussels are very attractive within international cultural ecosystems. Various aspects come into play in this regard: craft, content-related expertise and the distinctiveness of artists and creatives, cultural entrepreneurship, a progressive policy framework that supports open innovation from the bottom up (Arts Decree, Circus Decree, etc.), available training programmes (PARTS, HISK, Fashion Academy, etc.) and in some subsectors, networks of highly active, engaged volunteers make all the difference. Factors such as location, accessibility and affordability, for example, also play a role in this regard. For some time now, the presence of foreign galleries and popular international art fairs has contributed to the international focus on Brussels as a centre for visual arts. The question is how sustainable this international focus is, and how policy can capitalise on it.

In short, a strong local cultural scene in Flanders and Brussels, with international qualities, has a pull effect on international talent. Not only does this have an impact on cultural ecosystems, but it also has the potential to enrich the broader local social context.

- ▶ **A rich and diverse (local and international) offering in Flanders and Brussels offers recognition and new perspectives for the (superdiverse and multilingual) creators and general public. Within global networks and value chains, identity is an important consideration.**

Cultural developments play out on an international horizon. It is important to make the public part of these international developments and propose a qualitative, rich and varied cultural offering to the target audience and the wider population in Flanders and Brussels. This offering ensures recognition and new perspectives, thanks to international and intercultural exchange and performances. Presenting and contextualising non-European cultural practices also helps to challenge and broaden sometimes one-sided perspectives. Films, series



and documentaries offer a unique view of the world and international developments as seen through the lens of filmmakers.

Cultural practices also stimulate interaction and strengthen social cohesion. Based on their artistic practice, artists reflect on (global) social developments. They contribute varied and multi-faceted perspectives on contemporary society. Presentation venues (festivals, biennials, art halls, etc.) act as links between the artistic work and local communities, through overarching actions (after talks, catalogues, curatorial formats, etc.). Festivals and exhibitions explore how specific global themes are translated to the local context and how this can again enrich and enhance international debate. This works both ways: just as it is important to introduce new perspectives into Flanders and Brussels through international performances, performing or exhibiting work from Flanders in other countries can also lead to interesting cultural additions to local communities and debates there¹³. We observe that our local contexts are also themselves multilingual and superdiverse. Our cities are increasingly international hubs. In a superdiverse and multilingual environment, where 'Flemish' creators and audiences are no longer necessarily Dutch speaking, it is crucial to propose a recognisable and diverse offering to the local population. International programming can make a contribution in this regard.

3.2.2 Financial-economic drivers

Financial-economic drivers are important to many actors, although economic gain is not necessarily the goal in itself. However, working internationally is a necessary condition for organisations to sustainably develop their practices or careers. Some work ad hoc internationally, for others it is an essential pillar in the business model. Working internationally requires investment and resources, both from within the organisations themselves and support from governments or public-private parties. International recognition is important for the reputation and prestige of organisations and anyone working in the cultural and creative sectors. Building this reputation does not happen automatically and requires initiatives to generate visibility, individually but also collectively (e.g., collective promotion at the sector level), and usually over a longer period of time.

- ▶ **Working internationally provides continuity in the activities of and market expansion for artists, creators and producer organisations, especially in niche markets (where the market or ecosystem in Flanders is small).**

For many artists, musicians, authors, cultural workers, architects or publishers, working internationally, at home and abroad, is crucial to ensure the continuity of their activities and/or achieve bigger markets. In a small market like Flanders, it is difficult for producing actors in many disciplines to achieve sufficient stability and sustainability in their activities.

For the 'live' arts, for example, the domestic market is often too limited, meaning that international opportunities to perform are necessary, in order for a dance or circus company, for example, to (continue to) exist. In the visual arts, international work, such as (solo) exhibitions and residencies, is necessary for sustainable career development, given that exhibition opportunities at home are limited. This need for internationalisation applies not only to artists with marketable work, but also to those with a more reflexive practice, as well as curators and art workers. In the design field, internationalisation leads to increased sales and revenues, more reach, mitigated

¹³ For example: "Reframing the international can also mean to work profoundly in a context other than the one in which you're based. To not just drop-off one's product and move on. (...) It can give you the opportunity to speak from an outside viewpoint. You're the fool, the stranger. There is a more reciprocal relationship in this kind of profound international work; more than mutual curiosity is at stake: both parties are invited to fundamentally review their respective identities. (...) It's what I would call emancipated internationalisation." (Pieter de Buysser, [Hello Aunt Cécile, hello police officer: welcome and join in | Flanders Arts Institute \(kunsten.be\)](#))



risk by diversifying the activities, etc. For authors and publishers in the Dutch-language book market, in Flanders as well as in the Netherlands, an international presence is important to build a career, for example. The number of translations purchased by foreign publishing houses is crucial, not only for financial considerations, but clearly also for prestige both in Flanders and abroad.

In short, the necessary income is earned from international activities (fees, buy-out fees, co-production contributions, commissions, etc.) to continuously develop activities and build a solid commercial base. Support for internationalisation (e.g. co-financing, co-production, the search for foreign investors, etc.) acts as a lever in many cases. Intellectual property can also be an important aspect in the business model of artists, performers, producers, designers and developers, e.g. through income from royalties or selling on concepts.

- ▶ **Visibility (prestige and reputation building of products, oeuvres, names - as well as collective visibility of subsectors) is important to generate financial resources and create opportunities.**

Some artists take on international activities to get noticed and be visible (and make the international activities recurrent in the process). Visibility and prestige are important for individual artists, creators, bands, designers, architects, etc. A strong reputation for their creations, products, oeuvres and expertise abroad is a lever that creates opportunities, thereby contributing to economic continuity. This also plays out at the collective level: for example, in the past, the public perception of the 'Flemish wave' in the performing arts proved to have a strong mobilising effect. A similar dynamic is at play today in the field of architecture (e.g., [The Flanders phenomenon: how Belgian buildings went from joke to genius | Architecture | The Guardian](#)). These dynamics not only create opportunities abroad, but also lead to a positive dynamism at home. International success at home can help create the right conditions in which ecosystems can flourish; it is therefore an additional argument for support at home, which results in the mobilisation of resources and (media) attention.

- ▶ **Working internationally is important for co-financing and co-production: mobilising resources such as financial resources, infrastructure and talent within international value chains.**

Mobilising production resources within international value chains, through co-financing or pooling other resources (infrastructure, expertise), is important. The reality of international value chains, as highlighted in several sectors (see annexes), means that working internationally is not just a choice, but a necessity. It is not possible to produce an art-house film with purely Flemish resources. In the gaming industry, the market in Flanders is unable to shoulder the cost of producing games. This is comparable with transnational production models in other subsectors, such as contemporary dance (where international co-productions are common), but also in the field of authors and publishers or the co-production of international exhibitions. Encouraging such international investments in Flemish cultural productions or attracting venture capital are therefore important in some sectors to make production possible at all.

Coproduction is possible through resources, but can also be through time and space, residencies, materials, know-how., etc. In addition to mobilising financial resources, it is also important to mobilise talent. In a global competition for talent, especially in the gaming industry, attracting and retaining qualified personnel is a priority.

- ▶ **Audience-related income from international work can include: attracting foreign visitors, crowdfunding within international communities, etc.**

Income earned from audience-related international activities takes diverse forms and offers various opportunities depending on the context. Attracting foreign visitors to cultural events and exhibitions, through international



collaborations or events with an international scale, can provide a significant economic boost to the sector in Flanders itself. In addition, crowdfunding (on digital platforms, within international communities, e.g. Kickstarter) are a way to garner financial support for cultural and creative projects and initiatives. These resources can enable musicians, designers, and other artists and creatives to realise projects. However, these initiatives are often project-based. There are not many well-known sustainable financing models based purely on crowdfunding.

3.2.3 Network-related motives

Developing a network is essential for sustainable internationalisation. Working internationally connects artists, cultural organisations and cultural practices and creates meaningful relationships with new and more diverse audiences.

► **Peer solidarity: learning together, sharing in transnational communities in European networks.**

Artists, creatives and cultural professionals know how to find and connect with each other, meet in international contexts and also maintain international networks with each other. The added value is in multiple areas. We already highlighted the added value of international co-creation for content-related innovation. But meeting in person encourages knowledge sharing and practice development and can also be personally reinforcing, motivating and empowering for people who sometimes have to work and make ends meet in precarious conditions. In recent years, more and more collectives and platforms have emerged within the arts where artists from international backgrounds find each other. Examples include the informal network State of the Arts (and initiatives such as SOS Relief, the Fair Arts Almanac, etc.) and the many artists' organisations such as SPIN, Enough Room for Space, [POC POC Who's There](#), etc. who also continually critically question and reassess the frameworks and conditions for international work. These are not only places where artists (with an international background) reflect together on the challenges they face; they are also the places where broader reflection takes place and initiatives are launched to strengthen the position of (international) artists. These are also the contexts in which new forms of international solidarity are being experimented with (see also the above-mentioned Creative Europe project [Reshape](#)).

This point applies not only to artists, but also to different types of actors such as translators, programmers, curators, educational organisations, critics and music export agencies, etc. They are involved in international networks, sometimes informal but sometimes highly organised, sometimes with a long history but often with limited resources.

► **Sustainable partnerships between different types of actors within value chains are important: between residencies, producers, distributors, presentation venues, financiers, etc.**

Not only international relations among peers, but also relations among different institutional positions are crucial. Strong international networks are a means and a prerequisite for achieving the content-related enrichment and economic opportunities mentioned above. Artists and cultural actors are increasingly working in a situation where the various cultural functions - content development, financing, creation and production, presentation - are developed from network constellations of sometimes highly specialised actors. This is often on a project basis. It therefore requires all actors who are internationally active to invest time and capacity to develop networks, orient themselves and maintain lasting relationships with the actors they need to achieve their own objectives.



Different types of actors set out to facilitate this international networking. For example, the cultural intermediary players (centres of expertise and funds), who play a platform role and work on developing collective international relationships and public perception. They organise the Flemish presence at interactive venues and B2B platforms that are important within their sectors: the leading fairs, showcases, biennials, festivals, etc.

Examples include European networks, partnerships and platforms in the context of Creative Europe: e.g. European Festivals Association, IETM, Circostrada, European Dance Development Network, etc. which work towards bringing different types of actors together in international sectoral ecosystems.

- ▶ **Connections within society are essential: the importance of an international offering (presentation, talent development, education) for diverse and international audiences at home.**

We have previously discussed the content-related added value of international cultural practices for audiences and communities in Flanders and abroad. International programming enriches the debate in a local context, both in Flanders and beyond. Presentation venues (festivals, biennials, art halls, etc.) act as links between the artistic work and local communities, through overarching actions (after talks, curatorial formats, etc.). Arts education players are also essential because they contribute to cultural literacy against the backdrop of the international cultural horizons under discussion.

We observe that our local contexts are also themselves multilingual and superdiverse. Our cities are increasingly international hubs. In a superdiverse and multilingual environment, where 'Flemish' creators are no longer necessarily Dutch speaking, it is crucial to propose a recognisable and diverse offering to the local population. The offering is broader than presenting exhibitions, concerts or performances: also in the field of talent development (e.g., arts in free time, DKO, etc.) as well as education, it is important to have an offering that is recognisable to people from different backgrounds.

3.2.4 Sustainability considerations

Working internationally requires energy and has an ecological impact (CO₂), in the context of global climate change.

- ▶ **As is the case in broader society, in the (internationalisation of) cultural ecosystems, the debate on environmental sustainability is becoming ever more prominent. Reducing carbon dioxide emissions is a first important consideration in all sectors.**

In this regard, calls are made to reduce carbon emissions and for more 'green practices' in terms of cross-border mobility of people and productions, production processes, cultural infrastructure and the organisation of events such as festivals and exhibitions, for instance. In a limited number of countries, this is already a prerequisite when funding for international projects is awarded. ([Towards sustainable arts: European best practices and policies - Boekman Foundation](#))

- ▶ **Besides reducing their ecological footprint, several respondents - especially within design, architecture and socio-cultural work - indicated that they see it as their mission to play a positive role in the social transition in view of global challenges such as the climate and energy crisis, based on their specific expertise.**



Cultural ecosystems have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to a more just and sustainable society by serving as a space for collective imagination about what a more sustainable future might look like. Of course, this means that individuals also have to work in an environmentally sustainable manner.

3.2.5 Personal motivations

Working internationally is important for recognising and developing talent. Working internationally also requires certain professional skills and competencies, and therefore the necessary training, sharing of knowledge and information, etc.

- ▶ **Working internationally inspires, empowers and motivates people.**

Working internationally within cultural ecosystems is a source of inspiration, empowerment and motivation, both for individual actors and communities. This is the case for professionals, but also within the amateur arts, including circus workshops (and production groups where young people perform their work internationally), and socio-cultural work, strengthening and motivating volunteers is also one of the main motivations for working internationally.

- ▶ **Arts education organisations (e.g. circus ateliers), amateur arts organisations and (higher) educational institutions offer an international context and breeding ground: this is where the 'spark' and love for the profession, the knowledge of international networks, the first contacts and networking for students and alumni take place..**

These organisations act as the initial spark that ignites the potential of future artists and creative professionals. Through their international orientation and connections, these institutions offer a wealth of knowledge, experience and global networks. Students and alumni have the possibility to find inspiration in a wide range of cultural influences and perspectives, broadening their creative development and horizons. As such, these organisations play a crucial role in nurturing emerging talent and shaping the future of the cultural sector, both nationally and internationally.

- ▶ **Lifelong learning: the importance of international exchange and knowledge sharing for professionalism, knowledge sharing, content exchange, etc., among artists, professionals and volunteers.**

Lifelong learning is a cornerstone in the professional development of artists, designers, creatives, professionals and volunteers within cultural ecosystems. International exchange and knowledge sharing play a crucial role in promoting professionalism, sharing knowledge and the exchange of content-related expertise. See also §3.4.1.

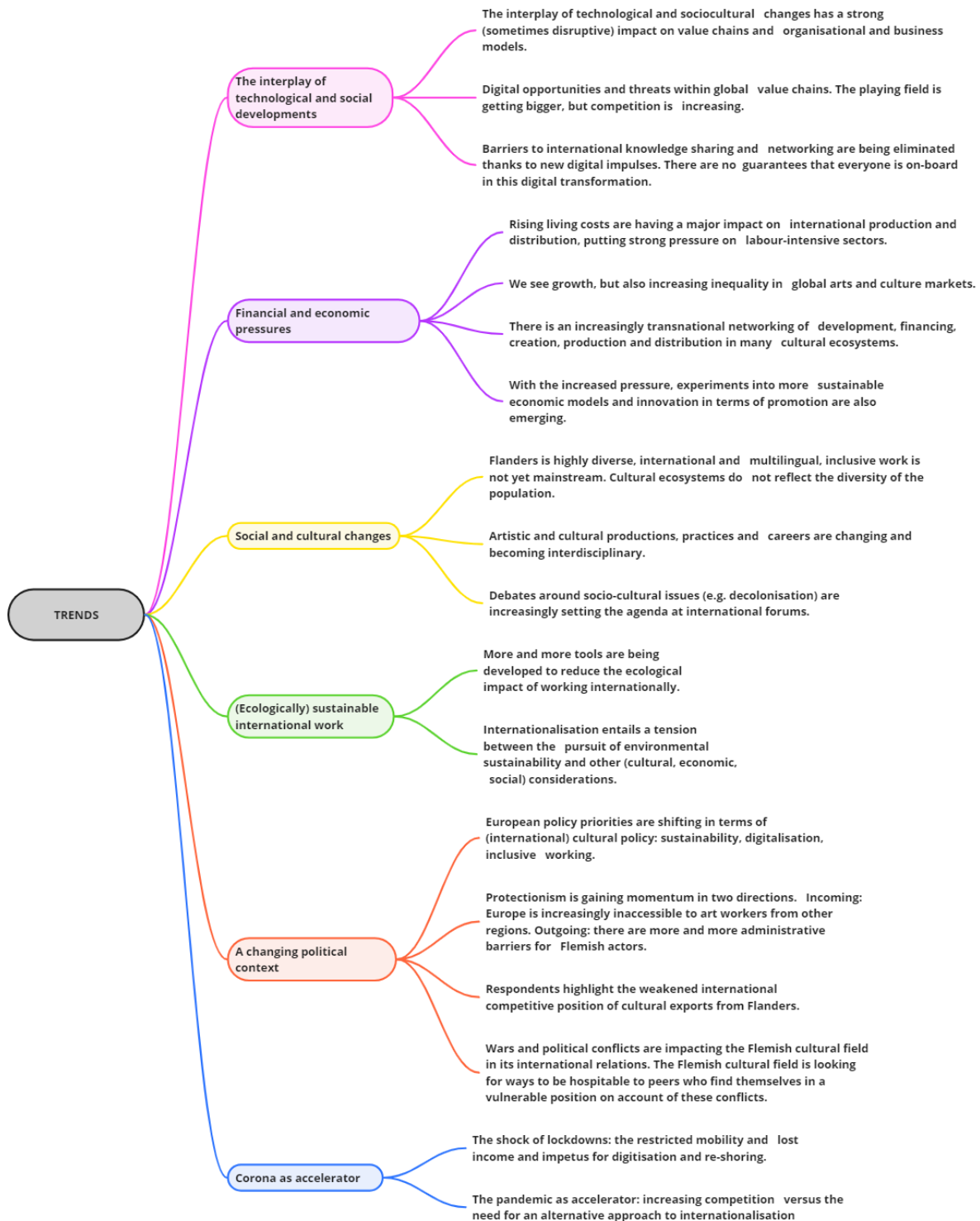
- ▶ **The importance of fair practice, accessibility and inclusive working at all levels (artists, cultural professionals, public).**

An important consideration is that international cultural development opportunities must be inclusive and accessible, without barriers or exclusionary mechanisms as regards gender, colour, disability or socio-economic status, etc. The fact that this kind of consideration is becoming an increasingly important element in decision-making frameworks can be seen in a variety of ways, e.g. attention in policy frameworks of cultural institutions, subsidy mechanisms, the make-up of cultural programmes, etc.



3.3. Trends in international cultural ecosystems

The above paragraph shed light on the motivations behind working internationally. These motivations partly influence how, where, with whom and when individuals work internationally. At the same time, (external) trends also have an impact on working internationally. We will now briefly highlight these various, more recent trends that are important for the subsectors. The sector analyses explain these trends by subsector (see annexes).



3.3.1 The interplay of technological and social developments

- ▶ **The interplay of international and more regional technological and sociocultural changes has a strong (sometimes disruptive) impact on organisational and business models.**

Technological developments are accompanied by changes in the production and consumption of cultural goods, which sometimes result in disruption to existing business models in various sectors, such as music, film, games and literature. In the music industry, the rise of first downloads, then streaming services and now social media platforms (YouTube and TikTok) is having a highly disruptive impact. This has not necessarily resulted in sufficient income for artists. Live performances have become more important within business models. This is leading to opportunities, but also creates pressure. Even in the resolutely international film, audiovisual and game industry, economic, technological and socio-cultural developments have resulted in profound changes in the production, consumption, development and promotion of films and series. In the gaming world, there are shifts from physical sales to digital downloads and online distribution. These evolutions go hand in hand with social and cultural developments, with games playing an increasingly prominent role in the lives of younger generations. For more detailed trend analyses we refer to the [Doorlichting van het Vlaams audiovisueel beleid 2021 | Vlaanderen.be](#), by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Interuniversity Microelectronics Centre-SMIT.

New methods of promoting work have emerged in the design and visual arts sectors. This is putting pressure on traditional platforms for promotion and interaction, such as fairs and biennials. It is also a challenge to develop new forms and content for international promotion. The literary landscape has also undergone profound changes as a result of international innovations and digitisation - made worse during the COVID-19 pandemic - when the digitisation of work processes was given a huge boost. Among other things, this resulted in the development of (primarily commercial) international book and reading markets and platforms, which increasingly determine what is made, distributed, sold and read. This B2B 'Amazonification' of the international reading market, without the intervention of local/regional or national publishers, stores or Flemish promotional tools, has far-reaching consequences for the sale of Flemish literary products, in Flanders and abroad.

- ▶ **Digital opportunities are often also threats within global value chains. New production capabilities create a larger playing field, but also increased competition.**

Within the audiovisual sectors, technological developments such as artificial intelligence, virtual and extended reality, and breakthroughs in game engines (software for game production) have made significant progress. This opens the door for a variety of applications in different sectors, as well as immersive experiences within music, film, performing arts, exhibitions and museum visits (such as the use of technology by Ristband for concerts in the Metaverse, the use of AR in exhibitions, etc.). Virtual and augmented reality technologies are becoming more common in media, offering new opportunities for international interaction and immersive experiences. Furthermore, artificial intelligence is increasingly being used to automate tasks such as the creation, selection and distribution of content. This opens doors to new ways of international audience engagement, but also raises questions about the (im)possibilities surrounding copyright in AI-generated music. Read e.g. [You can't call me AI, a longread from VI.BE](#).

In architecture, technological applications and software are also becoming more accessible to smaller firms, thereby offering opportunities for Flemish architects, at home and abroad. Organisations such as CREW focus on crossovers between live arts and immersive technology, including within European research projects. Technological developments sometimes lead to hypes (which often fizzle out). For example, the rise of NFTs (non-fungible tokens) in the visual arts sector is a double-edged sword, experiencing a recent hype that does not look



like it will continue. NFTs have already been sold for significant amounts in the recent past, although there now appears to be a downward trend.

Digital platforms are creating new forms of promotion and distribution. New technological developments, such as e-commerce, social media and the metaverse are providing new ways to reach international audiences in various sectors, including music, the visual arts, design and more. These technologies make it possible for artists and producers to reach international audiences and buyers quickly and efficiently - sometimes even without the intervention or mediation of labels or publishers and other gatekeepers. One example is the use of digital platforms such as Bandcamp, which provide alternative distribution channels for various genres of music within highly specific niches and communities. New opportunities are also emerging within the gaming world, not only for mainstream productions, but also for independent and 'atypical' games, which can more easily appeal to a global niche audience.

Flanders DC has collected information on more than 30 online platforms of Belgian origin, where actors from different sectors such as design, music, literature, visual arts, fashion, games and cultural heritage can share their portfolio with anyone who is interested. See [Flanders DC - More than 30 online platforms from Belgium](#).

The new possibilities are also leading to increasing competition, sometimes identified as 'oversupply' in markets where many players are active and blockbusters often attract the most attention. It is increasingly challenging for a Flemish artist, musician or writer to thrive and stand out in this expanding pool, or rather ocean. It is also a challenge to develop new business models that are compatible with these technological developments and are also profitable and sustainable in the longer term. Actors in the, by definition, international field must be flexible and adaptable and pursue innovation in their strategy and organisation to take advantage of new possibilities.

There is a huge need - clearly also among the pioneers in this field in film, music, games, performing arts ... - to be able to translate innovation into a sustainable business model. Good practices in Flanders in the field of culture and technology are still relatively limited (see [Unwrap](#)), and for the time being there is less structural investment compared to neighbouring countries and regions such as the French Community (Wallifornia) and the Netherlands. For many players, it is highly uncertain what opportunities will emerge in the evolving Flemish policy in this area (e.g. Flanders Technology and Innovation) to take concrete steps.

- ▶ **There are also new, digital impulses for international knowledge sharing and networking, even in the less technologically/economically driven sectors. This is creating a more level playing field by removing a number of barriers. But is everyone on-board for the digital transformation?**

More opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking have emerged in just about every sector. Not only has the technology become more accessible, but we learned how to work with it during corona. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a greater acceptance of digital meetings worldwide, e.g., in terms of attending and organising conferences, training courses, workshops and webinars. This has added value in terms of environmental and social sustainability. Online and hybrid formats mean that actors who would otherwise face barriers to international mobility (financial constraints, physical obstacles, etc.) can participate in international exchange in an accessible way. The global trend for more digital working has led to easier and more cost-effective participation in international conferences and lectures.

Within the amateur arts, the socio-cultural field and especially civic organisations focusing on international themes and diverse audiences, the possibilities of digital platforms and social networks are being exploited in often exciting ways. Globally connected communities use easily accessible tools to share international inspiring examples of practice, for example VOEM, which, as touched on earlier, set up a Metaverse platform during the corona pandemic that continues to serve as an international interaction place.



New prospecting possibilities have emerged for performance venues, festivals and other entities within various sectors, such as music, performing arts and especially film. Programmers no longer need to travel as much in order to view productions. (freely translated) "The benefits of the digital acceleration are being seen at the international level: digital prospecting, online portfolio reviews and matchmaking, online events for knowledge exchange, international partnerships with less travel, time-saving digital photography couriers - there are countless opportunities" ([Kunsten na Corona](#), p. 24). Moreover, there are also more and more questions about the environmental and social sustainability of digital networks and capabilities. More often than not, questions arise at the international level regarding so-called 'digital degrowth', i.e., how to reduce your digital footprint (gigabytes, servers running, etc.) and thereby also show solidarity with communities that are not (yet) connected to the seemingly infinite world wide web.

3.3.2 Financial and economic pressure

- ▶ **Rising living costs are having a major impact on international production and distribution. Inflation impacts wages, production costs, travel, accommodation, transport, etc. This puts strong pressure on labour-intensive sectors.**

One factor that has a significant influence on international activities is the economic pressure that has grown throughout society due to the rising cost of living, including the energy crisis, consumer price and wage inflation, war(s), etc. These economic pressures are naturally reflected in many cultural sectors through rising labour costs and higher costs of production and distribution: the increasing costs of travel, accommodation and transport that come with working internationally.

Rising material production costs are affecting various sectors, in particular material design, fashion, audiovisual production, the performing arts (e.g., the production and transport of sets), the visual arts and literature (including costs for paper). Unique, handcrafted objects have higher production costs compared to industrial production. Rising production and distribution costs may encourage organisations and companies to move (part of their production) to low-wage countries, leading to new forms of international production and distribution, as for example within the Flemish games sector where there are suggestions that aspects of game development can be outsourced to countries with lower wages.

In addition, costs for travel, accommodation, and transport have risen, affecting visitor programmes, travel grants, and the movements of artists, musicians, authors, programmers, curators, and management professionals. Rising labour costs affect the operations of all cultural organisations, especially within the most labour-intensive sectors such as live performing arts and music, circuses, audiovisual production and gaming. For producing organisations, these rising costs result in higher buyouts fees, while performing organisations face lower budgets for performance, programming and co-production. This makes it increasingly difficult to achieve the same performance with the same financial resources. This has a huge impact on the international dissemination of the performing arts.

- ▶ **We see growth, but also increasing inequality in global arts and culture markets. Global economic growth within certain profit-driven subsectors (e.g., the visual arts market, music and film industry, games, etc.) goes hand in hand with economies of scale and monopolies. At the same time, the pressure on small and medium-sized players is growing. Individual actors (artists, creatives, designers) often work on an individual basis and are in vulnerable socio-economic positions.**



The higher economic pressure has different impacts in various subsectors, depending on the value chains, market conditions and business models applied. In many sectors, such as music, the visual arts and film, there is a concentration of power among larger, often global players, while pressure is growing on smaller and medium-sized players. There are forecasts of long-term growth in the music industry (source: [Music Moves Europe](#)). However, this growth is largely generated by larger concerns and companies, prompting questions about long-term sustainability, especially for smaller Flemish players being bought up by international concerns. What impact does this have on the acts they represent?

The position of larger fairs within the design sector has also shifted due to economic pressures and the new possibilities for international promotion through digital tools. Fairs at home and abroad are seeing their role as international promotional platforms for design diminish, while others are moving to a new role where ideas are exchanged, partnerships are created or major international issues are debated. The agencies that support design from Flanders/Belgium internationally are also revising their promotion strategies. Economic pressures, oversupply and increased competition in many sectors are leading to a struggle for exclusivity in various areas, such as intellectual property. There is competition at the international level for exploitation rights to series, films and games. Major music festivals demand exclusivity from the bands that perform.

A unique situation is arising within the fast-growing global gaming sector, in particular with regard to remote working and the competition for talent. Funding seems to be less of an issue within the gaming sector, according to our respondents, than attracting the right people to realise projects. High labour costs, the loss of talent and marketing costs pose challenges for the gaming industry. Competition with low-wage countries and countries offering attractive tax concessions are factors in this regard. Countries with a long tradition of developing games are also attracting companies and professionals, including those from Flanders. As such, one major trend in working internationally in the game sector is remote working, linked to the global competition for talent. For Flemish companies, this can be a way to attract international talent, while Flemish gaming talent has the opportunity to work for international clients. Alumni of HOWEST, for example, work all over the world.

- ▶ **There are an increasing number of transnational networks for development, financing, creation, production and distribution in many cultural ecosystems. We observe the outsourcing and offshoring of production, through various new organisational and production models. Fragmentation of budgets is resulting in hypermobility among individual and small actors, with increasing pressure on their socio-economic position and mental well-being.**

In a rapidly changing and volatile economic environment, many individuals are seeking new strategies for sustainable internationalisation which fit in with this dynamic, international context. In the live arts, sustainability is fostered by optimising existing models for international performances and touring, where gains can be made both on the economic and environmental fronts. For example, more compactly organised tours within music, performing arts and circus are being pursued. Examples include platforms such as [CircusLink](#) and new collaborative models within the performing arts that go beyond ad hoc sales and distribution of performances.

Technological innovation, such as data-driven market development in the music industry, helps managers, record labels and performance venues use digital platforms to evaluate potential in specific markets, for example using tools such as [Soundcharts: Music Analytics Tool](#).

Collaboration and co-financing remain crucial in sectors such as the performing arts, circuses, audiovisual production, and film, as well as in exhibitions within the visual arts and cultural heritage. In the film and television sector, new opportunities have emerged in recent years thanks to international co-financing models. International



cooperation models are also emerging in film distribution, where festivals from Flanders, the Netherlands and French-speaking Belgium collaborate on distribution.

Given the various challenges, including increasing competition, economic pressures and the rise of digital platforms, most sectors (visual arts, design, performing arts, circus, music) are considering new approaches to international promotional platforms, such as fairs, showcase festivals, visitor programmes and film screenings. There are various examples of initiatives of collaborations between private organisations and public institutions, with an emphasis on visibility in the city and a choice to focus on specific niches or social themes. These initiatives are often organised by local, more small-scale organisations that take on the role of (international) meeting venue, e.g. Antwerp Design Week, COLLECTIBLE and others.

- ▶ **With the increased pressure, experiments into more sustainable economic models are also emerging. There is a focus on re-shoring production, distribution, and promotion of cultural products and goods. Circular thinking is starting to gain traction. Artists are focusing on commons and working together for a fair new world: international experiments with collective and solidarity-based working models, among themselves and together with other sectors (health, sustainability, security, education, etc.).**

In parallel with the acceleration and fragmentation of processes, there is increasing interest in alternative and more sustainable forms of internationalisation, with a focus on slower processes and a new balance between local anchoring and meaningful international exchange. The Corona crisis has made this call more urgent and broader. Other experimental initiatives can be placed in the context of the transition to a more equitable and inclusive form of international cooperation. These initiatives include self-organisation on the part of artists, for example, both locally and internationally, based on the principles of solidarity and reciprocity. Examples include [Common Wallet](#), [Beyond the Now](#) (which involves researchers and curators), and the [Cross Commons Curatorial Collective](#). These initiatives are designed to enable the sharing of resources, both financial and in terms of networking and physical and digital infrastructure, between artists and organisations. This study focuses on achieving economic, artistic, social and human sustainability for artists and cultural workers working individually. Although the collective self-organisation of artists is not new in itself, this idea is gaining popularity and experiments are being carried out with new, fairer working models based on the principles of care and solidarity. These experiments are primarily rolled out in an international context, including Europe and the broader Euromed region. Artists and organisations based in Flanders and Brussels play a connecting role in this regard. One example of such an initiative is the recent open call and publication by the Flanders Arts Institute entitled 'A Fair New World', as well as international projects such as RESHAPE, an experiment in collaborative change in the arts. See [A Fair New World ?! | Flanders Arts Institute](#), [Reshape](#), etc.)

3.3.3 Social and cultural changes

- ▶ **These days, Flanders is extremely diverse, international and multilingual. This is the case for artists, cultural workers as well as the general public and local communities. Their local anchoring and simultaneous global networks offer excellent potential for the internationalisation of cultural ecosystems. Inclusive work is gaining ground, but it is not yet mainstream. Cultural ecosystems do not in any way reflect the diversity of the Flemish population.**

In the international ecosystems, consideration for inclusiveness and representation is growing on various fronts: gender equality, colour, disability, etc., and to a lesser extent also on the fronts of age and socio-economic profile and class. On the one hand, it can be seen that the sectors and organisations in Flanders are still too homogeneous and do not reflect the diversity of the Flemish population. On the other hand, international



platforms have seen an increasing focus on artists within various disciplines who were previously less visible, such as women, non-binary people, people of colour and artists who are not able-bodied or neurodiverse. There is growing attention to gender equality in various sectors, as shown by the Keychange initiative in the music sector and various gender equality initiatives by the Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF). Audiences, which are also increasingly diverse, also attach increasing importance to representation in programmes. Specifically, Flemish performance venues, literary organisations, socio-cultural institutions, libraries, etc., emphasize the fact that not only are the creators and their works becoming more diverse, but also that the audience is more diverse and often multilingual.

Internationalisation and superdiversity are increasingly visible at the local level, even at the hyperlocal level. Artists, curators and cultural institutions are increasingly focusing on this development through initiatives such as cocreation and the active involvement of local communities. In the performing arts, projects are set up with the aim of creating new connections and interactions between the local and the international, taking into account the diversity of actors and influences (for example, by artists such as Benjamin Verdonck, Sarah Vanhee, Einat Tuchman).

Within literature policy, due to the scope of the Decree on the Flemish Literature Fund, there is still a focus on the Dutch language, while Flanders, Brussels, Europe and the world are increasingly becoming multilingual, diverse and digital. This applies to creators, distributors, publishers and audiences. The literary civil society organisations are already broadening the scope and committing to multilingualism in a local context. To give digital content a wider reach and, for example, to reach an international audience, using English is sometimes regarded as desirable or necessary. However, cultural heritage organisations - as well as other organisations within the arts - state that they face pressure to communicate in Dutch, which hinders them from reaching international audiences in the immediate area.

- ▶ **Debates on decolonisation, restitution, the de-centring of the Western perspective are increasingly setting the agenda at international forums. There are also more experiments with new management models and subsidy mechanisms that seek to introduce the principles of solidarity and reciprocity into a world where traditional power relations and inequalities are being called into question.**

International (network) organisations (and therefore also their Flemish members and divisions) involved with North-South relations are working on alternative management and organisational models aimed at equality and reciprocity. This phenomenon is visible in various sectors, including socio-cultural work - especially in organisations working on North-South issues.

Within the arts and cultural heritage sectors, there is a growing effort to bring non-Western viewpoints into the debate on sustainable internationalisation and collections. Collection managers, museums and art halls are increasingly emphasizing plurality and inclusiveness, as well as inequality, structural racism, stereotype framing and exoticism within an international context for cultural production and performance. There is an ongoing debate in the heritage sector about the possible restitution of colonial cultural assets. This issue is high on the international agenda, especially for service-providing organisations, museums and heritage units. The debate on decolonisation, plurality and restitution came up repeatedly in interviews and focus groups on socio-cultural work, arts and cultural heritage. Organisations want to explore how they can make more voices heard and promote dialogue, not least because international partners and funders are calling for it and/or expect it from them.

- ▶ **Artistic and cultural productions, practices and careers are changing and becoming interdisciplinary. Technological and socio-cultural development mean that diverse forms of cultural expression (urban,**



games, podcasts, etc.) are taking their place across disciplines. Artists and organisations are active in different fields and in different disciplines and formats.

There is a growing trend in which creators are active in different disciplines - and need a specific overarching structure to match this diversity. The current subsidy policy is not always equipped to deal with this. The Arts Decree is open to it, but there are still partitions between the decree and the operations of Flanders Audiovisual Fund and Flanders Literature. For literature, it is a challenge: there are an increasing number of authors who are simultaneously active in various artistic disciplines, including theatre, readings/performances, scripts, podcasts, opinion pieces, books and writers' labs. It is a policy-related challenge to recognise and adequately support this diversity.

3.3.4 (Ecologically) sustainable international work

- ▶ As regards limiting the ecological impact of international work (CO2 emissions) in terms of production, mobility and infrastructure, more and more actions and tools are being developed at the international level. There are also more experiments with innovative approaches and processes.

Like in other (policy) sectors, the cultural field is also paying more attention to energy efficiency and reduction of CO2 emissions. Many cultural subsectors are calling for a more circular approach, more small-scale production, sustainable material choices, site-specific work and adapting performances to the local level.

In terms of preserving, conserving and presenting collections (at festivals, exhibitions, museums), the emphasis is on greening infrastructure to improve energy efficiency. As regards presentation, various mobility options for the public are taken into account. Respondents also emphasized the environmentally-friendly organisation of events, with consideration for the use of materials, energy and resources. A number of cultural festivals and events profile themselves on their environmental sustainability - especially events with a niche identity, small-scale format and specific thematic focus, such as the Horst Arts & Music festival. A more sustainable approach is driven by legislation, such as the recent ban on disposable cups.

The international mobility of artists and cultural professionals is undergoing change, with digital channels and platforms such as Vimeo and Instagram being used for prospecting and promoting international travel, sometimes with an emphasis on train travel. Many organisations are searching for new models to produce and present cultural content, with a growing focus on 'slow touring' in sectors where live presentation is crucial (such as live music, circuses and performing arts). Moreover, there are more and more experiments with more environmentally sustainable processes, including concepts for organising international tours without the need for travel ([Showing without going](#) is an anthology by the artist Ant Hampton that listed several such strategies). Recent European subsidy frameworks such as Perform Europe and Culture Moves Europe are experimenting with incentives for more environmentally sustainable mobility. In various fields, including socio-cultural work, design and architecture as well as visual and performing arts, we see a shift toward re-shoring, shorter production chains and circular working models.

Funds and intermediary organisations propose tools to cultural players to make the latter more energy efficient. These include checklists, workshops, scans, knowledge sharing, coaching and (in the case of the funds) coercive incentives in supporting projects. Cultural organisations in Flanders are working together within the Pulse Transition Network to promote sustainability. [Cultuurzaam](#) is a website put together by Pulse that features various tools to help the culture, youth and media sectors systematically reduce their energy consumption and CO2 emissions. Cultural organisations also work with partners abroad to share knowledge and undertake joint initiatives.



Sustainability is a challenge for cultural infrastructure, especially in the heritage domain, where many international cultural activities are housed in monuments where energy efficiency is a major challenge, to put it lightly, not least because of energy-intensive climate systems.

- ▶ **Internationalisation entails a tension, firstly, between the pursuit of environmental sustainability, and secondly, economic and social considerations.**

Decision-making processes in all cultural sectors are slowly changing. Individuals and cultural organisations do appear to be becoming more selective in their choices regarding international mobility. On the one hand, respondents state that they travel when there are real opportunities to deepen their content and forge new contacts, since many meetings, prospecting and networking sessions are now also possible online. On the other hand, people in sectors that rely heavily on international mobility still travel a lot. Making selective choices remains a challenging task for many respondents. Indeed, travelling less also leads to losses in several areas: loss of income, reduced networking opportunities and limited opportunities for personal development and inspiration. For many respondents, this is a complex consideration, especially when the organisational model relies heavily on international cooperation and mobility. 'Travelling less or differently' is a significant threat when it jeopardises the continuity of the activities and incomes.

More and more, pursuing environmental sustainability is inextricably linked to the debate on historical responsibility, social justice and equal opportunities within a global context. In the international art world, there are many who lack the resources, documentation or freedoms to be internationally mobile. The fact that working internationally is still a matter of privilege is evidenced by many examples of artists and intellectuals from the Global South experiencing difficulties getting started in a Flemish cultural context. Short- or long-term recruitment and assignments for people from the Global South do not automatically lead to residency permits, creating major uncertainty for all involved. Both for international guests, who find it hard to understand why they are not welcome when invited, and organisations from Flanders who have no certainty as to whether their projects can go ahead.

In this context, calls to travel less or not at all are seen as the continuation of historical inequality. Read this [open letter](#) from Mexican performing artist Lázaro Gabino Rodríguez to French choreographer Jérôme Bel.

3.3.5 A changing political context

- ▶ **European policy priorities, as well as those in our surrounding countries/regions, are shifting in terms of (international) cultural policy. Sustainability, digitisation, inclusive work, diversity and gender equality, for example, are receiving more attention. This has an impact on the operations of cultural ecosystems, in Flanders and abroad. At the same time, European and international directives and regulations can also be restrictive for the international operation of Flemish actors.**

European networks and partnerships are important for all subsectors. In general, these initiatives have emerged from the bottom up and are sometimes, but not always, supported by European policies (e.g. through various subsidy opportunities for networks, platforms and collaborations in the context of Creative Europe).

European subsidy opportunities are often limited to individual players and small-scale actors. However, new opportunities have emerged for this group in recent years, for example via Culture Moves Europe (formerly iPortunus) and Erasmus+, which are being used in various sectors that were studied.



The principle of subsidiarity stipulates that cultural competences are in principle at the level of the member states and that the EU only undertakes initiatives that exceed the capacity of the member states. From this perspective, within European policy, both within and outside the cultural sector, there is a growing focus on themes such as sustainability, diversity and digitisation. These are broader European themes, which are also central to cultural policy. The New European Bauhaus initiative makes a contribution to the European Green Deal from a cultural, creative and interdisciplinary perspective. Sustainability, diversity and digitisation are promoted within specific sectoral programmes, including, for example, Perform Europe, which focuses on sustainable touring within the performing arts and circuses, and [MusicAire](#), an initiative focusing on innovation and recovery for the music sector after Corona. There is also a growing sector-specific focus on different disciplines in European policy. Cultural heritage has also been given a more prominent place on the European agenda in the past decade. The music sector and music exports have also been given a sector-specific focus (Music Moves Europe).

- ▶ **Respondents highlight the weakened international competitive position of cultural exports from Flanders. In other countries (usually larger countries), there is often a more effective export policy and competitive promotion models. This appears more and more to be the decisive factor when making choices on international platforms.**

Respondents in various sectors - especially in music and the performing arts - highlight the growing competition between cultural policies from different countries in terms of cultural exports. They claim that this weakens the competitive position of Flemish initiatives. In the music sector, there has been a rise in export agencies, showcase festivals, fairs, conferences and other support initiatives in various foreign countries. In the music and performing arts sector, it is reported that this type of additional funding through international cultural policy is increasingly decisive for the decisions of programmers, given the growing economic pressures and rising costs of living. Increasingly, producers are expected to cover their own travel, accommodation and transport costs. The financial aspect appears to play a bigger role than ever in the make-up of programmes. The business model of showcase festivals is also becoming more commercial: countries that pay more get more access and benefits. Flemish actors are then at a competitive disadvantage compared to productions from larger countries where the government (ministries, funds, arts councils) makes larger financial contributions to international presentations and tours of local companies, such as France, the Netherlands, etc.

- ▶ **Protectionism is becoming more prevalent, in two directions. Incoming: Europe (and therefore also Flanders) is increasingly inaccessible to artists and art workers from other regions. Outgoing: there are more and more administrative barriers for Flemish actors (Brexit, US, East and Central Europe). In some countries, performance venues are encouraged to have a more limited international programme.**

In countries where the policy has a strong focus on regional identity, such as Poland and Hungary, performance venues are increasingly expected to prioritise local artists before programming international work. Growing protectionism can be seen in increasing administrative, legal and financial obstacles in strategically important markets for certain cultural organisations and subsectors, such as the United Kingdom (as a result of Brexit) and the United States.

This protectionism also has consequences in the opposite direction. Artists and cultural workers from the Global South, particularly from Africa, are finding it increasingly difficult to work in a European, including Flemish, context.



- ▶ Wars and political conflicts are impacting the Flemish cultural field in its international relations. Cultural organisations have long-term collaborations with partners in conflict zones. Many international artists and cultural workers are fleeing, due to various conflicts, discrimination, economic necessity or the consequences of climate change. How can the Flemish cultural field be open and hospitable to peers who find themselves in a vulnerable position on account of these conflicts?

The number of refugee artists in Flanders and Brussels has steadily risen, owing to international conflicts. Various cultural institutions maintain ties with organisations in both Ukraine and Russia, but these relationships are in a delicate situation. During the sectoral consultations, this prompted the question of how cultural organisations can show solidarity with their partners in Ukraine and how to deal with those in Russia. The conflict between Hamas and Israel and the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza was not an issue at that time, but it also subsequently prompted similar questions about the stance to take.

3.3.6 Corona as accelerator: working internationally at a tipping point?

- ▶ **The shock of lockdowns: the loss of mobility and income and impetus for digitisation and relocation.**

During the global Corona pandemic, lockdowns caused a shock in terms of working internationally. The fact that international travel was seriously curtailed gave impetus to digital knowledge sharing and networking, and to the re-shoring of production, performance and promotion of cultural products and processes. There were declining audience numbers, both in Flanders and abroad, and major uncertainty as to whether the 'regular' audience would return. Some sectors saw a brain drain of professionals (to other sectors). There was a generational shift among the gatekeepers. Since the gates have reopened, the impact still reverberates.

- ▶ **Corona as accelerator: increasing competition versus the need for an alternative approach to internationalisation**

In a sense, Corona was also and above all an accelerator of movements that had already started, and which were previously addressed above. Social and technological developments had a serious disruptive effect, and still do, as they create new opportunities, but also an 'oversupply' and increased competition, a weaker socio-economic position for the weaker players in the chain, resulting in increasing burn-out and pressure on mental well-being and vitality. There is growing competition which requires actors to position themselves in highly competitive environments, leading to an acceleration (hypermobility) and fragmentation of international work. Many individuals see the need to jump on board this acceleration, competition and struggle for visibility. The need for a new, flexible and adaptive policy is evident as disruptions come one after the other at lightning speed. On the other hand, the contours of a 'different' and more sustainable approach to working internationally are also taking shape. A desire for new relationships between the local and the international, an environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, and equitable international practice that is based not on competition, but on the recognition of transnational interdependencies in global cultural ecosystems.

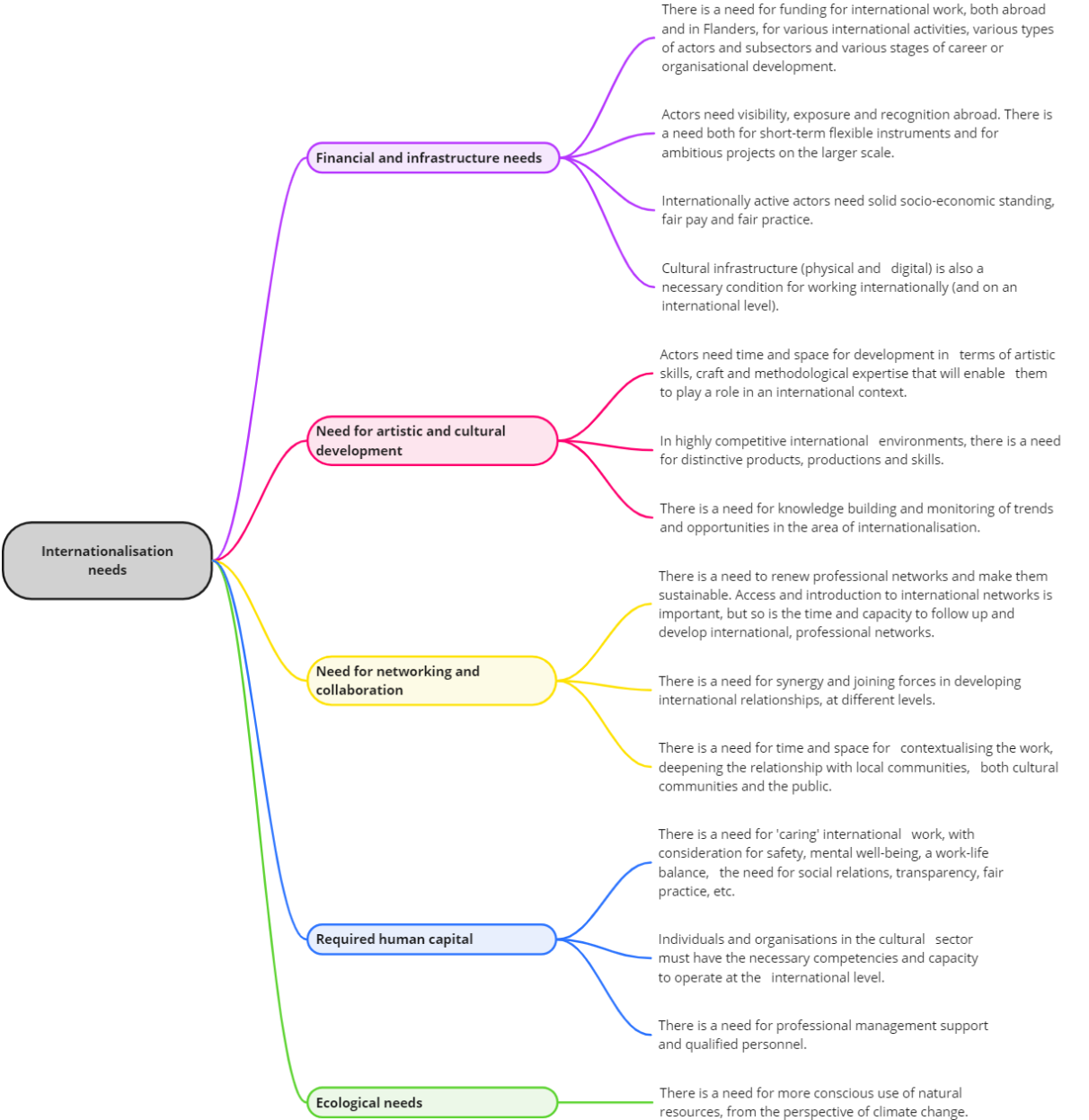
3.4. Needs in the field of internationalisation

We outlined above *why* actors work internationally and the importance of working internationally for their practice, the development of the (sub)sectors and society. Both intrinsic (artistic, cultural) objectives were addressed, as



well as financial and commercial, personal, social and environmental considerations. A number of trends impacting the way actors work internationally were then identified. In 3.4. we will address the needs of actors and sectors to capitalise on or more intensively exploit and further develop the many opportunities described above. When it comes to working internationally, there may be different objectives, logics, value frameworks and perspectives. But in all cases and in all sectors, working internationally requires the necessary funding, knowledge, networks, skills and natural resources.

In 3.4. we briefly identify the needs; in Chapter 4 we discuss in more detail the gaps perceived by actors in this regard.



3.4.1 Financial and infrastructure needs

- ▶ **There is a need for funding for working internationally, both abroad and in Flanders. This is for various international activities (production and performance, and definitely developmental and network-oriented activities, at various scales) for various types of actors (artists, and also curators, translators, supervisory staff) and subsectors, and at various stages of career or organisational development.**

Working internationally offers the prospect of various forms of value and meaning, also at the financial level. As advocated above, working internationally generates income and acts as a catalyst for sustainable economic activities. In some cases, an international breakthrough can also be profitable. But it also requires an investment to be active at the international level. There are various types of financial needs, which may differ according to sectors, institutional positions, the scale of operation, the positions taken on and also the stage of development an organisation or career is in. There is a need for the different types of actors and the different types of activities described in 3.1. It appears in this regard that many of these activities are not simply financed by the market. This is the case, for example, for (highly uncertain) investments in emerging artists or the international breakthrough of acts in a competitive environment, to labour-intensive processes and productions (e.g., an opera performance), or to activities aimed purely at developing practice, knowledge sharing, or networking.

- ▶ **Producers need visibility, exposure and recognition abroad. This acts as a lever for earning more income. There is a need both for short-term flexible instruments and for ambitious projects on the larger scale.**

Visibility and recognition act as a lever for earning more income, at home and internationally. A visible presence at showcase venues, festivals, biennials, etc., creates opportunities. These are also the platforms where collective promotion can be organised. Intermediary organisations try to create a more generally positive public perception abroad as regards the distinctive quality and dynamism in 'their' sector. A positive international dynamic in other countries can also lead to a positive dynamic at home, both among policymakers and a wider audience (e.g., the broader public perception of contemporary dance or contemporary circus).

- ▶ **Internationally active actors need solid socio-economic standing, fair pay and fair practice.**

This need for fair pay and a more solid socio-economic position - especially for the more vulnerable positions in the ecosystems - is advocated more and more emphatically precisely because there are many problem situations in practice.

Fees earned through buyout fees and contributions to co-productions are insufficient compared to the time and commitment required, such as fees for travel days. In the live performing arts, including the circus, music and theatre, companies are experiencing increasing pressure to include unpaid (supervisory) activities in addition to the performance. Meaningful steps have already been taken at the Flemish level as regards the development of frameworks and standards for fair pay and a sustainable socio-economic position for artists and art workers (www.juistisjuist.be). At the international level, such standards are non-existent, and the situation is perceived as complex (e.g., due to differences in the cost of living in different contexts).

- ▶ **The cultural infrastructure (physical and digital) is also a necessary condition for working internationally.** Physical infrastructure is essential in the artist's home country for residencies, the more large-scale performance-oriented activities such as exhibitions in museums, platforms for presenting larger stage performances, etc.). Digital infrastructure can include hybrid meetings, digital platforms for knowledge sharing, matchmaking and distribution,... Digitisation, for example in heritage, plays an essential role in the registration and management of



collections, but also offers opportunities, if implemented in a well-thought out way, to provide access to collections to a wider audience and professionals at the international level. This helps create more loans at the international level, and makes it possible for individuals to take part in international research.

3.4.2 Need for artistic and cultural development

- ▶ **Actors need sufficient time and space for development in terms of artistic skills, craft and methodological expertise that will enable them to play a meaningful role and position in an international context.**

Acquiring artistic-technical skills plays a crucial role in fostering internationalisation and sustainable career development. Working internationally can also help build and expand these skills and abilities. In all sectors, international knowledge sharing is seen as inspiring and enriching.

- ▶ **In highly competitive international environments, there is a need for distinctive products, productions and skills.**

As previously stated, in order to develop sustainable international careers, an artist needs to have their own stamp or artistic signature, a distinctive product (that can create momentum) or body of work/repertoire, distinctive skills, attractive content in order to compete... Indeed, in many sectors, the international situation is extremely competitive. What applies for skills development also applies for the development and maturing of artistic and cultural creations. Developing projects that stand up to international scrutiny and competition requires the necessary time, infrastructure and resources. Exhibition events, showcases, presentations, talent competitions and festivals (amateur arts), etc., are constructive situations where artists and creatives get feedback on their work from international communities.

- ▶ **There is a need for knowledge building and monitoring of development and possibilities in the area of internationalisation.**

On the one hand, there is a need for monitoring and deeper analysis of more general movements/inward and outward, who is working internationally and where. There is a need for knowledge building in this area, and especially also the translation into practice and policy, both within and between sectors/disciplines. Organisations are happy to benchmark, to evaluate their own capabilities and situation by comparing them with international initiatives. There is also a need for knowledge building on the 'demand side', on the developments, opportunities and threats in international ecosystems, especially in the volatile and rapidly changing situation we described above. There is a significant need for knowledge building among actors in the field on international contexts, opportunities and markets (how and who), a data-driven exploration of international opportunities, etc.

3.4.3 Need for network development and collaboration

- ▶ **There is a need to renew professional networks and make them sustainable. Access and introduction to international networks is important, but so is the time and capacity to follow up and develop international, professional networks.**



Many cultural organisations are de facto highly networked at the international level. This is usually via operating grants or on their own initiative. Various types of organisations develop networks: companies, ensembles, management agencies, artist-run organisations, workshops and residencies, socio-cultural associations, etc. Some of these organisations have highly developed international networks and structurally international operations (e.g., dance companies that make productions by pooling co-production resources, socio-cultural associations that are part of transnational network structures (e.g. Amnesty International Flanders)). Organisations working on specific themes or with target groups also take part in international networks, with a view to knowledge sharing and developing practice. The same goes for the sectoral intermediary actors, the centres of expertise and funds, which create opportunities for their rank and file through international networking, and share knowledge in the face of common challenges.

Gaining international recognition and access to international networks and markets is a major challenge. Building and maintaining a relevant international network is essential to the success of individuals and organisations in the cultural sector. Not only does it take time to develop these networks, it also needs to be possible to participate in international festivals, events and networking activities. There are significant barriers for emerging creators and companies, who still have a reputation and network to build and rarely have the capacity to make it happen. In some cases, existing networks are generally inaccessible. To overcome these obstacles, matchmaking is crucial, with the aim of introducing artists to new markets and connecting them with the right professionals. In the various disciplines, there are many organisations that help in this regard (workshops, residencies, arts centres, production houses) and peers also help each other.

- ▶ **There is a need for synergy and joining forces in terms of developing international relationships, at various levels: within the sectors (including through the support of sectoral intermediary organisations), between the agencies and policy areas involved in International Cultural Policy, etc.**

The intermediary organisations - above all the sectoral support centres - also play a role in the collective development of international relations, from their so-called platform function. In order to develop more clout in this regard, there is cooperation with and between the various government bodies involved in international cultural policy (policy areas, intermediary organisations). In principle, the presence of the foreign delegations of the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, Flanders Investment & Trade and VISITFLANDERS is an asset, both for establishing and sustaining contacts and for building knowledge about developments and opportunities in a specific region. Pragmatic collaboration with the 'neighbours' as privileged partners also increases the clout in a highly international context, to focus on visibility and network building. Consequently, many intermediary actors are developing joint projects with their counterparts in Brussels, the French Community and the Netherlands.

- ▶ **There is a need for time and space for contextualising the work, deepening the relationship with local communities, both cultural communities and the public.**

To capitalise on the added value of working internationally, it is not enough to engage in activities abroad, it is also necessary to exchange on this topic with artistic and cultural communities and interested audiences. This was highlighted in various sectoral contexts as a need and a real challenge. For example, in the literary arts, where it is not enough to publish a translation if it does not create a buzz in the context where the target language is spoken (if the translation does not get any attention, no-one buys it or talks about it). For example, in music, where there is a need for slow touring. For example, in the arts, where there are calls for more long-term residencies to facilitate meaningful exchange in a local context. In the performing arts, there are also calls for longer runs at the same venue, to allow for more in-depth exchanges with local contexts, so that they actually



resonate and have a meaningful impact in the local cultural context. As such, it is crucial to envisage sufficient time and space for these processes to flourish and add value to international collaborations.

3.4.4 The required human capital

- ▶ **There is a need for 'caring' international work, with consideration for safety, mental well-being, a work-life balance, the need for social relations, transparency, fair practice, etc.**

In the current context, where working internationally places a lot of pressure on the individuals involved (see above), themes such as mental well-being and fair practices are coming more under the spotlight. There is a need for caring international work, with consideration for a healthy work-life balance.

- ▶ **Individuals and organisations in the cultural sector must have the necessary competencies and capacity to be active at the international level.**

These include artistic and content-related skills (see above), as well as professional skills and entrepreneurship, a knowledge of the international context in specific disciplines or niches, digital skills, etc. The need for fostering expertise in international networking and collaboration was highlighted in all sectors. It is crucial to have the necessary knowledge of the field, both sector orientation and an understanding of policy tools and support possibilities for working internationally. Professionalism also includes a longer-term vision and strategy in the area of internationalisation. One essential need is to support organisations in developing well-thought out international policies as an integral part of their overarching policy.

- ▶ **There is a need for professional oversight and qualified personnel.**

Centres of expertise and intermediary organisations can propose an offering in this area, and work on sector orientation and referral to support possibilities, on top of initiatives focusing on visibility. At the same time, it is essential that actors in the field also have sufficient capacity and capability to capitalise on any opportunities that arise. Professional oversight - for example, by managers, booking agents, sales agencies and other representatives, etc. - is therefore essential, especially when there is increasing interest from abroad and actors are involved in recurrent international activities. Supervisory staff also need resources and opportunities for prospecting and international networking.

The position of business leader is a shortage occupation in many sectors. The post-corona period has led to a shortage of qualified staff in music and the performing arts, and in various subsectors (animation, games, translation and cultural heritage sectors). It is essential to address this shortage by investing in training which reflects the needs of the field, in knowledge, expertise and research, and at the same time it is important to offer challenging projects and competitive rewards.

3.4.5 Ecological needs

- ▶ **There is a need for more conscious use of natural resources, from the perspective of climate change.**

As touched upon above, this requires knowledge, awareness and tools for more energy-efficient practices in live events, tours, exhibitions, infrastructure, etc. Guidelines are needed for environmentally sustainable practices in production, distribution and international mobility, as well as experiments for more inclusive and environmentally



sustainable international practices. Raising awareness and creating a sense of urgency as regards environmental sustainability within the sector and society are also crucial. The impact of reducing CO2 emissions may go hand in hand with a fundamental re-examination of production and distribution processes within different subsectors.



4 / Current international cultural policy: gaps

We will now answer Research Question 2: 'How do the needs of the cultural and creative sectors relate to current Flemish and international cultural policy? What gaps are perceived relating to the principles of the Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy? In the subsections below, for each of the main principles, we indicate the perceived gaps in this area. In this regard, we use the structure of the Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy: the principles of the ICP (§4.1), gaps regarding the sector-driven approach (§4.2), the strategic choices made regarding the 'complementary' ICP (such as geographical focus areas, see §4.3) and, finally, the complementary cooperation between the relevant government bodies and the cultural intermediary organisations (§4.4).

Given the research question and related methodology, no evaluation of sector-specific instruments is possible in this study. The intermediary actors have a good overview of the field, and make an estimate of the sector-specific, international toolkit. At the same time, their (sometimes limited) remit results in a limited ability to act on the highly divergent international needs in the field. In addition, a limited number of actors in the field were interviewed for each sector; while they had a good overview of their specific subsector or sub-discipline, they were not necessarily fully informed in all cases about the opportunities for internationalisation offered by their practice, or the strategic ICP framework (for details regarding the subsectors, see the annexes).

4.1. Gaps relating to the principles of International Cultural Policy

4.1.1 The sectoral scope of the international cultural policy

What does the Strategic Framework say?

The Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy describes the sectoral scope of the ICP as (freely translated) 'the cultural and creative sectors' and defines these sectors. The framework also specifies that the ICP is primarily sector-driven:

- "(1) The target sectors of international cultural policy are the cultural and creative sectors: the professional arts (including literary, audiovisual, architectural, design and circus arts); - cultural heritage work and cultural heritage organisations; and adult social-cultural work and amateur arts".
- "(2) The Flemish international cultural policy is primarily sector-driven. Fostering international collaboration and orientation is an intrinsic part of the cultural policy in Flanders. Internationalisation and working internationally are necessary for the professionalism, sustainable career building of cultural professionals and the relevance of cultural assets and practices, cultural actors and organisations. Moreover, participating in an international project is an enriching experience that is often a springboard to more exchanges and new partnerships. The Department of Culture, Youth and Media (DCYM) facilitates, supports and encourages the sector in this regard." (p. 1-2)

The sector-driven approach is therefore the basis of the ICP; which is also referred to elsewhere as 'follow-the-actor-driven internationalisation'. This approach is complemented within the Strategic Framework for ICP by complementary approaches, culture-wide instruments and collaboration with other policy areas, deployed 'to



further increase the international clout and reach of cultural actors, goods and practices.' (Strategic Framework, p. 3) The Strategic Framework highlights initiatives taken by the DCYM in this regard, in addition to FLANDERS CHANCELLERY AND FOREIGN OFFICE (missions), FIT (support by FIT of the cultural and creative sectors, from the core mission of FIT) and VISITFLANDERS.

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **There is an imbalance in the distribution of resources and roles in the system of intermediary organisations between different sectors in Flanders. Certain sectors, including the amateur arts, circuses and games, and intangible heritage, have recently had strong incentives in terms of internationalisation, while others have not.**

Actors in the field and intermediary organisations highlight the fact that there is 'no level playing field' between sectors in Flanders in terms of resources and the role of the intermediary organisations. Some sectors have historically fallen behind, while others have enjoyed recent policy incentives. Within a number of sectors, we have seen strong incentives in the area of internationalisation in recent years. For example, in the amateur arts (more resources for the amateur arts umbrella organisations, expansion of the international toolkit), in the circus arts (focus on France), or in games (where in the context of the policy vision and action plans on gaming, a specific remit has been entrusted to the advocacy groups FLEGA and FIT), and (a strategic note for) intangible heritage. Within other broad sectors (Arts, Cultural Heritage) there have been financial injections that were not explicitly linked to internationalisation as a focus point.

In the current and previous ICP, socio-cultural work plays a limited role, while in practice this is involved in considerable international work. This was highlighted several times by the centre of expertise, by advocates and also the SARC¹. The discourse and objectives from the current policy strategy appear to be more focused on arts and cultural heritage, according to socio-cultural actors. Even though the socio-cultural and amateur arts sectors are mentioned within the scope of the ICP, the current strategic framework does not address the sector under the objectives and action lines (these subsectors are included in this Field Drawing).

- ▶ **There are sectoral differences as regards the type of support the intermediary organisations provide. There is considerable variation in the support from the intermediary organisations, whereby some sectors do not have a centre of expertise, or only have support with limited scope, remit and clout and/or fragmented support.**

For this study, we are examining the international remit of sectoral support centres, funds and other intermediaries (Flanders Architecture Institute, Flanders DC). The sectoral support centres add an international dimension to their core tasks (practice support, practice development, platform, public perception), with very different emphases. Not all sectors have a centre of expertise (literary arts, film, design, architecture e.g.) and/or the support is fragmented (design). The various centres of expertise also have different remits; this includes whether or not they collect and analyse data on internationalisation.

Funds and other intermediary players (Flanders Architecture Institute, Flanders DC) state that they have limited resources for broader support beyond their core missions (such as an ecosystem or career approach, working on the professionalism of actors in the field). The sector also indicated that thanks to the successful support of audiovisual productions (film, series, etc.) over the years, an ecosystem of cultural and commercial actors has been built up, who also take initiatives independent of Flanders Audiovisual Fund -supported projects. The field



has become much broader and needs are arising that Flanders Audiovisual Fund has difficulty responding to from its combination of core missions and related possibilities.

Flanders Literature says it wants to focus more on a career and ecosystem approach, because the activities of authors are highly diversified nowadays (in addition to books, performances, also podcasts, games or theatre plays, etc.) and because Flanders Literature considers the contextual and institutional anchoring of literary practice. "There is a need for a holistic perspective on what it means to be an author in society today." (Interview with Flanders Literature)

As regards the sectoral support centres, FARO and Flanders Arts Institute have had a budgetary 'correction' following previous cuts to the intermediary organisations (interview with the DCYM). Compared with previously, the Support Centre for Non-Formal Adult Education (Socius) has fewer resources to devote to the internationalisation of socio-cultural practice. Following cuts to Socius' operating funds, its current international operations have been significantly scaled back. A project subsidy application to focus more intensively on internationalisation was recently rejected.

There is fragmentation in the sectoral support for design: who takes on what role is not always clear to the target audience, and therefore in the international arena. Since the phasing out of the institute Design Vlaanderen, support possibilities have disappeared, or partly taken over by Flanders DC, as part of a new remit. Flanders DC also has a fashion-related remit, which does not fall within the scope of (international) cultural policy. In addition to Flanders DC, various regional actors are active in the field of design. Support for the (internationalisation of) design is provided by various actors with a local or regional focus (Designregio Kortrijk, MAD, Vaklab Kortrijk, Ministry of Makers, Antwerp Powered by Creatives). Furthermore, Design Museum will assume a role as a centre of expertise for design.

- ▶ **The processes of developing a strategic policy vision (and its translation) vary widely from sector to sector. This is the case for all strategic vision development, as well as the latter's international dimension.**

The Strategic Framework does not elaborate on the further sector-specific translation of the overarching vision for internationalisation. The strategic vision development and its implementation varies from sector to sector. This is the case for the broader cultural policy as well as its international dimension.

A number of subsectors are however developing a sector-specific vision (broader, and also with regard to internationalisation), included in a Strategic Vision Paper (Arts, Cultural Heritage), but there is no such vision in other sectors. For games, there is a vision and an action plan, *Level Up*. Specifically for intangible heritage, there is a vision paper at the Flemish level and also for the broad sector of cultural heritage, there is explicit consideration for international work within the Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage. Within the Strategic Vision Paper on the Arts, the vision for internationalisation is similar to the principles of the Strategic Framework. Internationalisation has been added as an additional assessment criterion in the assessment of five-year operating grants. As a result, organisations that applied for multi-year grants are expected to indicate how they contributed to the strategic policy vision. The focus countries are also used in the assessment of international performance projects.

In the interviews on cultural heritage, we observe the demand to translate the strategic vision into a stronger action-based, sector-specific policy. There is a demand to turn the strategy developed with the sector into an implementable policy, as was the case with WIE for intangible heritage. Further analysis of recent (policy) reports, inventories and visions, plus the interviews conducted, make it clear that the very different stakeholders in/near this highly diverse sector, agree in outline on a number of needs. At the same time, there appears to be a strong lack of translation into policy resources/toolkit and the failure (for now) to convert visions into actions and a budget.



Funds (Flanders Literature, Flanders Audiovisual Fund) have relatively large autonomy – within budgetary constraints and in consultation with government and sectors – to design and fine-tune objectives, priorities and instruments for their international work (see [Scenario's voor het beheer van de dynamische ruimte Cultuur \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)). With a five-year cycle (multi-year plans and management agreements), the funds enter into discussion with policy on strategic objectives and the relevant budget. The funds then enter into discussion with the sector on implementation of the policy and development of the toolkit. Much more than the DCYM, the funds can take into account the management side of things. Funds can strongly align their remits in terms of supporting projects as well as international promotion.

- ▶ **We received from the sectors (intermediary organisations and actors in the field) recurring comments that the sector-specific instruments are 'not sector-specific' enough and there is a demand for further diversification and sector-specific fine-tuning, preferably also tailored to niche practices and oeuvres – precisely because they are highly distinctive and promising at the international level.**

For example, cultural heritage includes diverse disciplines/subsectors with many different actors, who (may) be active at neighbourhood, local, regional, national and international levels. In the area of internationalisation, the needs of the subsectors differ significantly (e.g., museums and archives). The internationalisation of intangible heritage (driven by WIE, Werkplaats Immaterieel Erfgoed (Flemish organisation for intangible heritage)) is seen as a good practice.

Even for the broad domain of the arts, there are highly divergent needs, and we see requests for a more intricate approach. For arts in free-time, there are significant differences between artistic disciplines in each case. Within the performing arts, for example, it is much more difficult and uncommon to build an (international career) without professional arts training, than for example in pop, rock and electronic music. Autodidacts have more difficulty in continuing their growth path, and do not request international development as often.

VI.BE is a strong advocate of tools-on-demand for the music industry: "The current tools to promote internationalisation are not sufficiently aligned with the realities of the music sector." Aspects highlighted include the size of financial interventions, the time period between the submission and approval of support requests, assessment mechanisms and export tools aimed not only at artists but also at their entourage, such as managers and booking agents. Moreover, there is a need 'for broader support for internationalisation, including domains such as publishing/sync, songwriting camps, and marketing/pr of releases, and not exclusively focused on the live circuit' (input VI.BE). In principle, these are aspects that fall within the scope of project subsidies in the Arts Decree. In the focus group with actors in the field in music, we noted demands for strong diversification *within* the broad music landscape, which consists of highly diverse niches with individual circuits and customs. The opportunity for international impact increases if artists can further diversify in terms of niche practices.

In architecture as well as design, it is perceived as a barrier that the jargon in the Arts Decree does not match the self-profiling of the actors in the field, meaning that the possibilities for sector-specific support are insufficiently exploited. Both sectors find it restrictive to be handled within one discipline cluster for the procedures for the Arts Decree (whereby the sector-specific expertise within assessment procedures possibly falls short). The sources and interviews suggest that financial support for the sector to develop international initiatives is a major gap. Architects cannot easily identify with the terms used in the subsidy grant applications of the Arts Decree, which often refer to 'artists' and 'artistic practices' (Source: [Landschapstekening Kunsten 2019 | Kunstenpunt](#) and Architecture focus group). Furthermore, 'industrial designers cannot invoke the Arts Decree because in most cases their work is judged as not artistic enough (even if technically deserving or even groundbreaking, for example) and commercial (because it is intended for the market).' (Source: [Field Drawing design | Vlaanderen.be](#))



- ▶ **The government (DCYM) stated that after successive cuts, the capacity (people and resources) is too limited to develop a proactive international culture policy on top of the sector-driven approach.**

Interviews with staff from the Department of Culture, Youth and Media (DCYM) identified other challenges and concerns regarding the tension between a sector-specific and culture-wide approach within International Cultural Policy (ICP). The primarily sector-driven approach and cuts within the department create barriers to developing an effective ICP. There is a sense that the current ICP is largely anchored in decrees, making it difficult for DCYM staff responsible for ICP to play a guiding role, as in terms of coordination within the department (with sectoral staff, between Culture and Media) as well as with the intermediary organisations. When sector-specific tools are designed, the DCYM does not take into account enough how they will be managed. The resources for the overarching ICP are decreasing and, moreover, are largely allocated to ongoing engagements, for example in the context of Flemish-Dutch cooperation. As such, the initiative to internationalise is de facto placed almost exclusively with the sectors. In the DCYM's view, all these constraints are obstacles to developing a strong, overarching ICP.

The DCYM is currently confronted with reduced staff capacity in all areas. This has led to pressure on activities related to policy preparation and development, whereby the focus is primarily on policy implementation. Following the staff cuts, most of the time is spent following up on regular assignments (e.g., following up on the Language Union) or responding to ad hoc requests (e.g., collaboration on missions). There is a need for coordination between the International Aspects Team and the staff within DCYM who are responsible for following up on sectoral/decreed-related policy. There is coordination, but again, there are fewer resources and more tasks, so internationalisation gets less attention.

- ▶ **Within the sector-driven cultural policy, there is a perceived lack of a cross-sectoral approach, with consideration for a) the overlaps/partitions between the sectors within cultural policy (e.g. literature and theatre), b) meaningful connections with sectors that do not fall within the scope of cultural policy but have common ground with it (e.g. fashion, immovable heritage) and c) cross-domain collaborations in the area of cultural ecosystems, innovation, digitisation and technology.**

Partitions between cultural disciplines create barriers. For example, the partitions between the Arts Decree and literature policy help create the perception of inconsistencies. The translation of theatre texts by Flemish authors does however receive support from Flanders Literature, while the production of these texts by an international theatre company is subsequently not supported. It is difficult for an author to apply for subsidies outside the context of Flanders Literature.

There is a need for incentives for cross-sector collaboration - culture and technology. With regard to various sectors (music, audiovisual, games, cultural heritage), there are calls for more of a focus on cross-sectoral innovation in terms of digitisation and technology. As advocated above, technological developments impact the cultural, social, economic and environmental dimensions of internationalisation. In other regions (the Netherlands, Wallonia) there is a stronger focus on innovation through cross-sectoral networking and research & development. In Flanders, initiatives such as Flanders Technology and Innovation and [Unwrap](#) demonstrate interest, but as yet there is no structural commitment to these crossovers.

There is a need for synergy with adjacent plots. There are calls for more content-related synergy with sectors outside the scope of the ICP. Flanders DC regrets that fashion is not included in the scope of the International Cultural Policy, and therefore not within this exercise. Nevertheless, there are many overlaps and possible synergies that Flanders DC can capitalise on as part of its remit. As regards cultural heritage, the obvious links with immovable heritage (monuments and landscapes) are highlighted, especially when internationalisation is viewed through the lens of tourism and attracting visitors (domestic and foreign).



4.1.2 Flanders and Europe

What does the Strategic Framework say?

The Strategic Framework recognises that Flemish international cultural policy must relate to international policy platforms.

- ▶ "(3) In addition, international cultural policy is influenced and inspired by European and multilateral policy."
- ▶ "At the EU level, policy and financing frameworks are created and regulations adopted that respond to international trends and developments. In the interest of the sector, I make sure that these are in line with the relevant Flemish policy and, where appropriate, bring Flemish policy in line with European priorities. I always respect the principle of subsidiarity in this regard. In this way, I want to create a context in which the opportunities offered by the EU, including as a subsidy provider, are maximised. Multilateral Organisations and more specifically UNESCO and the Council of Europe are important because of the legal and soft law frameworks that are created there, and provide the opportunity to benchmark, strengthen and renew policies at the international level. The presence of these institutions provides opportunities for inspiration, international resonance and the spread of Flemish knowledge, expertise and excellence." (p. 2)

The importance of international platforms and their interaction with Flemish policy is also emphasized in the Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage. In particular, the international treaties and conventions of the European Union, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, etc. have helped shape Flemish cultural heritage policy to a significant extent and remain an important point of reference.

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **The impact of international policy decision-making forums remains significant, and can be seen in regulations that sometimes stimulate and sometimes restrain, and in incentives for major issues such as digitisation, sustainability and inclusiveness.**

The continued importance of interaction with transnational policy becomes clear in the development of policy frameworks on Intangible Heritage. UNESCO primarily focuses on cultural and immovable heritage, and Workplace on Intangible Heritage, DCYM and Flanders Heritage are particularly active in this area. In recent years, the Flemish government has invested significantly in the relationship with UNESCO/ICOM (networks, participation in committees, etc.); these transnational bodies also determine an important part of the rules in the area of heritage. Respondents have indicated that the pioneering role played by Flanders in certain areas could be emphasized more strongly, for example, in terms of thinking about and implementing an intangible heritage approach, through which Flanders implements the UNESCO Convention 2003.

The subsectors indicated that European regulations have an impact on the operations of organisations and sectors. It is therefore clearly necessary to weigh in on this, preferably in consultation with the intermediary organisations and interest groups. One example from social-cultural work: in addition to the federal, Flemish, provincial and local levels, (social-)cultural organisations are increasingly coming into contact with European regulations. The influence of European measures is felt by the sector in dossiers on taxation and VAT, voluntary statutes, the Royal Decree on lending rights, among others. The EU copyright directive strengthens part of the cultural field, but may have a negative impact on the willingness of international financiers to invest in the game sector in Flanders (highlighted in the interview with Flanders Game Hub). The European focus on major themes such as diversity & inclusion (and decolonisation), sustainability, fair practice, etc. also increasingly has an



influence on Flemish actors. European policy frameworks within and outside the cultural sector (New European Bauhaus, Creative Europe, Perform Europe, Culture Moves Europe) are increasingly focusing on this area.

- ▶ **It is still important to strengthen actors in the referral to European subsidy frameworks and support programmes. This is not only a question of a support offering (referral, coaching) but also of sufficient capacity for organisations to develop applications and be part of European partnerships.**

The Flemish cultural sector makes use of European funding. A survey by IDEA Consult among users and referrers revealed that (freely translated) "today, Creative Europe is mainly used for submitting funding applications, complemented by Erasmus+, Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe, ERDF/INTERREG and ESF. Within the Horizon programme, research and innovation projects are the main recipients of funding. However, there is currently no clear insight into how many Flemish cultural organisations participate in EU projects, how they find out about EU funding possibilities and what barriers they face in (wanting) to attract EU funding." [Final report referrals to EU funding \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

In the sector consultation for this research, it was often highlighted that there is too little 'support' within the sectors to access the toolkit (see also under 'professionalism'). While intermediary actors do encourage applications within EU programmes, they are at the same time critical regarding the feasibility and effectiveness; is the investment in time (and therefore money) in proportion with a potentially positive outcome? At the EU level, the planning burden is high and the success rate low. There are primary opportunities for organisations with sufficient capacity and already established networks. This point was noted in interviews regarding most subsectors (circuses, amateur arts, socio-cultural work, arts, cultural heritage, film, etc.). The so-called co-financing instrument in the Cultural Heritage Decree is a response to this, see [Internationale projecten die cofinanciering vereisen | Department of Culture, Youth & Media \(vlaanderen.be\)](#). It was indicated that co-financing was not used as an instrument within the current Amateur Arts Decree (source: DCYM).

EU programmes have seen significant improvements in terms of the planning burden; however, the image of a significant planning burden is persistent. More easily accessible possibilities have been introduced within Erasmus+ and Creative Europe (Culture Moves Europe). But it is a complex issue: the lack of capacity and support among organisations means that information does not reach them effectively.

The administrative planning burden was regularly highlighted as a barrier in the Flemish sectoral toolkit (often noted, but rarely elaborated upon). We noticed in the interviews that the Flemish toolkit is not always well known. Sufficiently raising awareness of it among the sectors is a continual focus point.

4.1.3 International cultural policy both in Flanders and abroad

What does the Strategic Framework say?

The Strategic Framework on ICP recognises that international cultural policy plays out at home and abroad. The emphasis within the Strategic Framework is likely to be strongly focused on the export perspective. (freely translated) "International cultural policy plays out at home and abroad. However, the core of this paper concerns activities that take place abroad. An effective international cultural policy also has a strong internal - domestic - component: among other things, developing a reference policy in the area of events, conferences, etc. that strengthen the international networking and reach of the sector. Among other things, the work of Event Flanders falls within this." (p. 2)



What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ The Strategic Framework in ICP primarily looks at exports, and less so at the international dimension in Flanders. In a changing society, for various reasons (the multilingual and superdiverse reality in Flanders, the emergence of transnational value chains, the global networking of local cultural practices, etc.), there is a need to re-examine the purely export-oriented perspective of the ICP, with more consideration for import and mutual exchange.

From various interviews, we gleaned an emphatic demand and need to be more mindful of the international dimension of the sector and society "in Belgium", within the framework of the ICP. How can these be factored into future international cultural policy? How open is the system and are we (the field and government) willing to look at it again with a fresh perspective?

This is partly about 'importing', 'bringing the international here'. Reciprocity is put forward by a number of actors (the intermediary organisations, actors in the field) as an important condition that will ensure that 'the international field' will also be more receptive to cultural actors and goods from Flanders. In the words of one respondent: "We expect foreign countries to be open, welcoming and accessible, but how open are we ourselves, how welcoming and responsive is our international cultural policy?"

Only within architecture is it asserted that 'imports' are currently more encouraged than exports. But it is actually this sector where there are strong incentives to enhance the international dimension in Flanders/Brussels. The instrument of the Open Call of the Flemish Government Architect is expressly aimed at making construction contracts in Flanders more attractive to international agencies. This resulted in a strong injection of quality as regards architectural culture in Flanders. Respondents from architecture (Flanders Architecture Institute, focus group) indicate that a more protectionist reflex is often observed in other countries, as demonstrated by, for example, strict expectations in terms of the necessary references. It is more difficult for Flemish architects to get opportunities abroad, than vice versa.

- ▶ **There is not much focus in the ICP on the multilingual and superdiverse reality of Flemish society.**

In today's globalised, networked society, due to various social factors (migration history, the globalisation of value networks, technological and social developments), *home* and *abroad* are not easy to separate or distinguish. This is clearly visible in artistic and cultural practice, where the creators, products and processes can no longer be understood in terms of 'national'/'regional' background.

The same goes for the target audience, which is highly diverse and multilingual. An international audience does not necessarily have to be simply "flown in". Audiences in cities, neighbourhoods and districts are sometimes more diverse/broader/international than those reached in foreign venues or exhibition venues. And there are also an increasing number of international digital B2B platforms where, without the intervention of a government or intermediary organisation, international cultural products can be bought, rented, seen or sold directly. These include music, books, podcasts, movies, series, etc., but the list of subsectors is actually endless.

Being 'Flemish' has also changed and is not always or exclusively Dutch-speaking. How can the diversity of society in Flanders and Brussels be more visible in ICP? Many cultural organisations are focusing on (super)diverse audiences and creators. Language legislation is also important with a view to the participation of both the local population and international tourism. To increase the reach of digital content, and also to reach an international audience, for example, it may be advisable to allow people to also work in English in Flanders. Several organisations report experiencing pressure when working in English.

The literature policy shows that the two points of reciprocity/import and multilingualism/diversity are different from each other. For example, Flanders Literature can grant translation subsidies, a tool to bring literature from



other languages and countries to us ('import'). On the other hand, Flanders Literature cannot take initiatives for authors who live and work in Flanders but do not write in Dutch. The legislation then becomes a barrier. Flanders Literature is required by decree to support Dutch-language books. In principle, there is no support for Flemish authors here who write in other languages. Literary civil society organisations are less bound in this area and can take initiatives in the area of multilingualism, invite non-Dutch-speaking authors for programmes (presentation, talent development, etc.). Passa Porta takes the multilingual reality in Brussels as its starting point. To a lesser extent, language is a barrier at Flanders Audiovisual Fund; multilingual projects are possible, with selections in various tasks (English, French, Arabic, Italian) etc. Flanders Audiovisual Fund takes a loose approach in this area. "The credibility of the project is the main thing" (interview with Flanders AudiovisualFund).

- ▶ **The Strategic Framework for ICP looks primarily at the export of supply, and less so at the demand side. Also for the sectors, the approach is primarily 'what we have to offer other countries'. There is often scant consideration for demand in the market, nor for the social and cultural context where cultural goods or practices ultimately land.**

Both in the ICP and in conversations with intermediary actors and actors in the field, there is a lot of focus on the supply side (creators, products, processes) according to the principle of 'follow the actor'. Within this approach, this actor is then a Flemish producer. In general, there is very little focus on purchase/demand side. Whereas the demand side (both in the more conventional export policy of purchases, and in a digital world 'without borders') in fact has so much more to choose from and is no longer necessarily tied to the conventional gatekeepers, who may or may not highlight Flemish and/or Dutch-speaking origins.

There is also generally little insight into the purchase (i.e.: demand/target audience) side of working internationally and also little factual understanding of how working internationally ultimately comes about: is it based on explicit demand from abroad, is it on its own initiative (with all the risks that entails), is it an 'elicited' demand or collaboration? This point was only raised by a very limited number of respondents. Overall, we know far too little about this question, especially in terms of mapping and numbers. Nevertheless, there are also new opportunities in this area with the emergence of digital platforms. There are more possibilities, especially within music (see, for example [Soundcharts: Music Analytics Tool | Analyze All the Music Industry Data](#)) and VI.BE calls for the cultural sectors to be supported in the area of data-driven internationalisation.

The sales market, especially within non-subsidised/profit contexts, offers a sobering perspective. In the literature focus group, one publisher stated (freely translated): "The perspective of all publishers is also profit. All publishers also have an idealistic desire, but the figures have to be right at the end of the day." The publisher emphasizes that the share and therefore the impact of a translation subsidy in the decision-making process on a project is generally limited, and that it may be a policy priority to focus on promoting reading, including for international literature in Flanders. Flanders Literature, in collaboration with the Dutch Foundation for Literature, is researching the demand side (interest in translations, foreign publishers, venues, press attention) as well as working closely with (third-party) international partners to promote/sell Flemish authors/translations abroad. That is also where the interest in the German-speaking market comes from. At the same time, the focus is sometimes also on a very small language area (e.g.. Slovenia) whose (added) value is not always well understood by the outside world (publishers).



4.1.4 The reach and economic development of Flanders

What does the Strategic Framework say?

Besides the follow-the-actor-driven approach, culture, according to the ICP, is also used as a tool for the reach and economic development of Flanders. Culture is also a tool within broader Flemish foreign policy and economic policy.

(freely translated) "International cultural projects are also rolled out to strengthen Flanders' international policy, positioning and reach. This is the case with cultural diplomacy, which includes all projects of international cultural cooperation that help realise the policy goals of Flemish foreign policy. Flanders Chancellery & Foreign Office (DKBUZA), Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT) and VISITFLANDERS (TVL) exploit the international allure of cultural and creative sectors in achieving their international objectives." (p. 2)

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **The policy objective whereby there is a focus on strengthening practices and networks in the sector 'from the bottom up' is at odds with the policy where the focus is on the allure of Flanders, as intermediary actors are eager to cooperate pragmatically with their French-speaking counterparts.**

While a lot of policy attention is given to the branding of Flanders abroad, in many sectors there is a serious need for pragmatism: working together with Wallonia-Brussels or the Netherlands in foreign countries, or in other ways, may be more effective in having an impact on the ground, as intermediary players can then pool resources, knowledge and contacts and therefore have more impact on the ground. Less for ideological than for pragmatic reasons, collective international promotion also chooses branding that starts from "Belgium," such as "Belgium Booms"(music) or "Belgium is Design".

- ▶ **Given the objective of putting Flanders on the international map, in practice the focus tends to be on 'established names' within the arts and heritage, while the international potential of other sectors remains underutilised.**

Internal analyses at the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office on the use of ad hoc subsidies show that certain sectors are de facto more qualified to put Flanders on the international map, than others. The ad hoc subsidies for *cultural diplomacy* mainly support projects in classical music, museums and performing arts (including a lot of dance). There are not many projects in contemporary music, film, circus, literature, fashion and architecture (source: Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office internal analysis on ad hoc subsidies 2014-2022). The following is the result of the potential seen for individual objectives on the one hand, and history and connections on the other. We quote from the internal paper of the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office (freely translated):

- Concerning performing arts: "After 2000, these productions in the performing arts also started to be performed more and more abroad - mainly in Europe, but the Netherlands and France are still the main markets. International cooperation has become much more important for the Flemish performing arts. Dance and theatre companies easily find their way to diplomatic representatives. Moreover, the cooperation between CYM, Flanders Arts Institute -which supports this sector- and the diplomatic network is very strong."
- "Classical music concerts are strongly represented. It could be asserted that this engagement is in line with traditional customs in the diplomatic world."



- "Highlighting old (and contemporary) Flemish Masters in cooperation with foreign museums is an established practice since the rich Flemish art history can be linked with the general image of Flanders, current tourist assets, and the use of museum rooms for our own events."
- Geographical differences also come into play. "Paris supports a whole range of different disciplines. In Berlin the main focus is on classical music and literature. South Africa places strong focus on multidisciplinary arts, of arts festival and street art. Especially at the New York and Vienna delegations, there has been a strong focus on the Flemish Masters." (Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, Analysis 2014-2022 cultural diplomacy subsidies).

The sector highlights the danger that the ICP only focuses on 'proven' quality and excellence. It was pointed out on several occasions (including in workshop with the intermediary organisations) that excellence is only the result of years of investment in development. There is a chance that talent will dry up if proven quality is the only focus.

► **Government agencies experience resistance to the objective of positioning Flanders.**

Other policy areas (VISITFLANDERS) experience resistance in the cultural field to contribute to the objective of positioning Flanders. At the same time, the sectors often take a very pragmatic approach in this regard; if concrete opportunities for visibility and network development arise from the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office or VISITFLANDERS toolkits, there often does not seem to be a problem in getting on board.

4.1.5 Thematic gaps in the basic principles

- **The Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy makes little or no mention of environmental sustainability, diversity/plurality and decolonisation, or fair cooperation, which are themes central to the international debate.**

These themes, which are central to the international debate, are barely covered in the Strategic Framework, but partially addressed in the Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage¹⁴. Environmental sustainability, diversity/plurality and decolonisation, fair practice, digitisation and the relationship between culture and international conflict situations are key themes that shape the international debate on international cultural cooperation and international cultural policy today. These themes emerge from the present Field Drawing as important concerns for actors in the field. They are also increasingly criteria within transnational policy frameworks as well as at international performance venues. In the current Strategic Framework for ICP, these themes are missing or not really developed.

At the international level, there are intense discussions on diversity, inclusion and (de)colonisation, in heritage but also in other sectors. The policy is (extremely) cautious in this regard, but that does not make the issue disappear. Flemish cultural institutions where this is relevant, or will be, will have to 'do something' with this in their Flemish and international practice. The reality in Flanders and Brussels for literary and heritage institutions (e.g., collections), for example, is one that includes major, international issues around the colonial past, plurality

¹⁴ "Sustainability, both industry and policy are already taking actions to reinforce environmental sustainability and share relevant knowledge. For example, the Pulse Transition Network offers tools to systematically reduce the energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions of organisations, and my department, FARO and the Institute for Artistic Heritage, among others, are jointly looking into methods to make climate systems more energy efficient. My department is also participating in an Open Method of Coordination group 'Strengthening Cultural Heritage Resilience for Climate Change', which may lead to relevant international knowledge exchange and concrete policy proposals." There are also sporadic references to diversity of opinions and colonial heritage in the Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage, but this is not really elaborated in relation to international work. The same goes for the Vision paper on intangible heritage.



and diversity. The Flemish government may not see this as an (exclusively) 'Flemish' task, but looking the other way does not lead to a serious position/prestige of Flemish heritage in the international context.

4.2. Follow the actor? Gaps from a sectoral perspective

The ICP starts from a 'sector-driven', 'follow-the-actor' approach. It is indicated in this regard that the ICP aims to strengthen the sectors in terms of their international presence, visibility and network development¹⁵. Below, we start with the question of what gaps are identified in this regard in the studies and documents reviewed (desk research) and/or perceived by the sectoral actors interviewed (intermediary organisations, actors in the field). In the process, we will build on the framework in the previous chapter § 3 in which the value and significance, motivations and needs of the sectors were considered from five dimensions (artistic-cultural, social, individual, economic and ecological). Precisely because this is the 'sector-driven' side of the ICP, we primarily draw on sectoral sources; input from the consultation with government bodies is incorporated into the other subchapters (4.3 and 4.4).

As regards sectoral sources, we note that the broad field of culture has a diversity of opinions, and that demands, opinions and perceptions of gaps can vary widely depending on the perspective of the respondent. As such, we see differences not only *between* sectors, but also *within* sectors, according to the background and institutional position of the different respondents; they place different emphases and perceive (different) gaps. The approach from the different dimensions means that we can incorporate all these demands together within a consistent framework, which, as best as possible, does justice to different perspectives and opinions.

4.2.1 Gaps in artistic and content development

- ▶ **There is not enough consideration for artistic and cultural development and long-term 'growth paths' in the ICP. If we simply look at the big names of today, we forget to invest in long-term development. There is a danger that the success of certain productions, oeuvres, names or broader movements may be short-lived. Developmental trajectories, growth paths and talent development therefore needs to be actively pursued, taking into account the different career stages.**

In a workshop with intermediary actors that looked explicitly at the ICP framework and the needs in practice, the need for growth and development paths to avoid exhausting talent was made clear. There is a perceived lack of capacity and support for international growth paths and development in the ICP, and too few support opportunities. There is a perception that internationalisation is overlooked *as a means of professionalism* and there is insufficient acknowledgement of the time required for international growth paths. Working internationally is not only about exporting products but also about circulating and building knowledge and expertise. There could be much more international exchange with other organisations (such as job shadowing and mentoring programmes) than is currently the case.

¹⁵ Besides promoting visibility and presence, the Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy also emphatically advances the network dimension: (freely translated) "Objective 2: Encourage international cooperation, networking and exchange," "This exchange goes via individual contacts and via international networks for professionals and networking events, at home and abroad." (Strategic framework ICP, p. 4).



Funds see a strong focus on product-oriented activities from their core mission and pursue more opportunities for career and talent development and expertise exchange. For example, limited budgets result in a gap in the area of scenario support, according to Flanders Audiovisual Fund, Flanders Literature has long insisted that it wants to complement its production-oriented focus with career, pathway and process support, including in an international context.

Promoting career and talent development is seen as crucial, not only for fledgling artists, but also for those midway through their careers. For example, there is concern about exposing young talent too early to the international market, when they are not yet ready for such a step. There is also concern about the needs of mid-career artists, who are too old for the offerings for starters and new emerging talent, but can still be supported in their efforts to go international.

- ▶ **There is a need to 'scale up', both project-based and structurally, at the level of projects, budgets and ambitions. There is a perception of too little space for large-scale and internationally distinctive projects and events, nor for scaling up existing strengths and expertise so that the larger institutions (museums) can structurally compete at the international level.**

With current budgets, it is not possible to focus long-term on participating at the international scale, or to play a meaningful role in the important forums. For example, experts from cultural heritage argued that the government does not know enough about which forums/platforms/networks/top 10 museums of the world are relevant and to what extent the government should allocate resources to be involved/talk at these levels.

Within music, it is indicated that there are many opportunities for the proverbial 'humus layer', but too few opportunities to focus on breakthroughs, to advance to the proverbial 'Champions'League', which requires a different strategy and different budgets.

Within the arts, it can be useful to enable not only small-scale but also more large-scale and long-term projects. It must be possible to roll out international performance projects on a longer-term basis and with larger budgets. A major exhibition requires longer-term funding and larger budgets. For museums, there are also various costs in terms of insurance and loaning out works. Most art museums are funded locally, and international (co-production) exhibitions usually require Flemish money. An indemnity scheme has since been adopted for Flanders. The indemnity scheme is only available for the major museums/exhibitions, but this is still a problem for lower echelons.

Scaling up may also mean learning from each other, between emerging and experienced actors, sharing know-how and resources. But it is clearly also a question of budgets and the will to collaborate and mobilise resources around a shared objective. It is sometimes difficult to find the right way in this regard. For example, while the Flemish government (Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office) is funding a fellowship in Boston at the [Center for Netherlandish Art](#), museums/heritage institutions in Flanders themselves can find little or no funding from the same government for a similar initiative. Resources are limited and do not come from culture budgets, but this is seen as inconsistent by the sector.

There is also a demand from policy areas other than culture (Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, VISITFLANDERS) to engage in more large-scale projects on account of their mobilising power. Even here, it is still tricky to find good cooperation within and outside the cultural sector. For example, a major international conference or networking organisation requires intensive cooperation between the various parties. One successful example in this regard is the international conference on digital preservation, iPRES 2024 (<https://ipres2024.pubpub.org/>).



Within Event Flanders, there are possibilities in principle to focus on leading international cultural events in Belgium. A study will be launched in 2024 to explore the possibilities and provide guidance for one or more arts festivals to develop into a leading international event.

- ▶ **Within International Cultural Policy, there is little explicit focus on the value of culture as an engine for social and societal innovation. Nevertheless, Flanders has strengths, and this is a theme at the European level and at UNESCO.**

Within international cultural policy, there is significant emphasis on creators, products, oeuvres, etc. There is less focus on cross-cutting societal issues within the current policy. The fact that opportunities to put Flemish culture on the international map are being missed as a result is also raised by actors in the field, in particular within architecture, design, cultural heritage and socio-cultural work. Within transnational networks, socio-cultural organisations work locally on themes related to the transition to a more sustainable and socially just society. There are opportunities here in transnational and bilateral contexts, with similar organisations, for example in the UK, Germany or the Netherlands. Especially within architecture and design, there is a shift on the leading international platforms to a more social approach, from a sustainability perspective. There are opportunities here for the ICP, as Flemish architects and designers have a good reputation in this field. In the area of city marketing, many cities are making the shift from city marketing via showy architecture ("Bilbao") to an approach that accentuates the liveability of cities. Are there also opportunities to brand Flanders as a region that focuses on sustainability and liveability, including through culture? We refer to the sectoral annexes for architecture, design and socio-cultural work.

4.2.2 Gaps in personal development and working conditions

- ▶ **The ICP still does not have many incentives for fair practice, and caring international work.**

In many sectors, 'fair practice' is a big challenge. Artists, creators, musicians and designers are often underpaid for their work and contributions. In practice, there is often no fair remuneration, and this is especially the case with international opportunities that arise. While the Arts Decree does have incentives in this area, the ICP does not address fair practice. The analysis in 3.3 shows that there is more focus on this aspect, which is not covered by the current international cultural policy¹⁶. This is because the Strategic Framework is not a subsidy framework, but it can be touched upon in the basic principles as an important prerequisite for sustainable international work.

- ▶ **Organisations lack the capacity to seize opportunities and focus on professionalism and entrepreneurship with a view to internationalisation. There is a perception of too few incentives or support for organisations and regarding the (international dimension of) strategic management, entrepreneurship and innovation in this area.**

There is little point in creating opportunities abroad if actors in the field do not have the competencies and capacity to seize these opportunities. Organisations have a perception of limited support (time/resources) for international activities, including time and funding for staff deployment to focus on developing know-how and

¹⁶ Fair pay is sometimes a distinguishing strength different Flemish actors. This is the case, for example, with the Open Call of the Flemish Government Architect. "Unlike the toxic culture of open international competitions, which see countless architects waste days of unpaid labour to compete in a beauty contest of novelty forms, the Open Call is focused - and paid." ([The Flanders phenomenon: how Belgian buildings went from joke to genius, The Guardian](#)) Literatuur Vlaanderen also attaches great importance to quality translations as well as fair pay. Flanders Arts Institute is internationally known for its expertise in the area of fair practice, following several leading research and development projects (A Fair New Idea, RESHAPE, Do it Together, etc.).



networks and developing grant applications (especially also EU grants). There is an offering to inform actors about EU grant opportunities, but many lack the capacity to capitalise on this offering, draft applications or build the necessary networks.

There is an urgent need for professionalism and encouragement of entrepreneurial spirit, keeping in mind the development of business models with an international dimension. But many actors also need support in this area, and this is missing in the sectoral policy and the ICP.

Fully developing audiovisual producers in Flanders calls for a new perspective that not only considers the development and visibility of productions, but also the business strategy of producers and its broader potential for the broader Flemish audiovisual policy. In what way can the networks and expertise developed by Flemish audiovisual producers also be valorised and applied within audiovisual policy?

Working with multi-year policy plans for operating grants is seen as a 'blessing and a curse' in social-cultural work. Internationalisation is a process that requires (a lot of) time, attention, exchange, trial and error. The importance of white space is emphasized.

- ▶ **As yet, no links to education have been made in international cultural policy. However, the role of educational institutions is important for internationalisation but is not addressed in the Flemish international policy strategy.**

We have previously covered the importance of knowledge building, professionalism and international growth paths. It is not clear to what extent the artistic study courses adequately address this element. Educational institutions (and sometimes academic research units) also play an important role in the internationalisation of cultural sectors in other areas. They connect students with international networks of professionals. They are often an important international locus of attraction themselves. For example, P.A.R.T.S. (which helps make Brussels an international locus of attraction), or HISK within the visual arts, etc. Within the circus arts it is the other way around, and the fact that there are no higher circus schools in Flanders means that circus artists study at foreign schools. As a result, circus alumni with a Flemish background have an immediate international network during and after their studies. This aspect can be looked into more in the vision development.

We observe various points, as regards the inflow of specific profiles from training courses into the cultural ecosystems:

- Training programmes can be an important link, when it comes to a more diverse influx into the cultural landscape.
- There is a war on talent in games. In a globally booming sector, so they say, funding projects is less complicated than finding skilled personnel to develop these projects. HOWEST organises a training course that is highly regarded internationally. But in a global war on talent, it is difficult to get these alumni on board projects for Flemish studios. Within music and the performing arts, there has been a brain drain of technical profiles from the sector since Corona and the lockdowns.
- Audiovisual training courses are focusing intensively on creative profiles, but there is a shortage of technical and support profiles. The Flemish animation sector also faces a shortage of experienced labour profiles (animators, technical coordinators, directors, etc.). As a result, Flemish studios are forced to hire foreign freelancers who do not pay tax in Belgium and cannot be compensated with Tax Shelter funding" (Doorlichting audiovisueel beleid 2021, p. 152).



4.2.3 Economic gaps

- ▶ **Despite the economic and export focus of the Flemish ICP, a gap is highlighted in the tools and resources to strengthen the international position, visibility and presence of actors.**

The Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy has a strong export-oriented perspective, and this focus is perceived as one-sided by many actors (especially intermediary actors). But despite the strongly export-oriented discourse in the Strategic Framework for ICP, at the same time, in the context of higher economic pressure, there is strong demand for expanding and strengthening export support to actors and products from Flanders. In just about all focus groups with actors in the field, we note the demand for a more effective toolkit for 'export'.

The demand is emphatic within the music sector. The strategic plan on internationalisation that VI.BE is working on together with the Music Consultation does indeed relate to exports. To substantiate the need for an export agency, VI.BE conducted a benchmarking exercise with export agencies in Europe. Within the intermediary organisations, VI.BE in particular advocates a sector-specific export policy: (freely translated) "In just about all European countries, export resources are grouped within one organisation (music export agencies) which provides export subsidies directly to musicians and their entourage. In Flanders, these resources are dispersed and not all tools are known or well suited to the specificity of the cultural sectors." (Input from VI.BE)

Flanders Audiovisual Fund also argues the need for a larger budget for exports, by making an international comparison: Flanders Audiovisual Fund has a smaller production and promotion budget than many other international players (source: interview with Flanders Audiovisual Fund). Architecture also lacks financial support for innovation and 'unsolicited practice', referring to the Netherlands (Stimulation Fund for Creative Industry). Flanders Literature is in a weak negotiating position in joint projects with the Dutch literary fund, as they work with smaller budgets.

The question of 'export support' also came up repeatedly in other interviews and focus group discussions. Respondents highlight the fact that in an increasingly competitive international landscape, Flemish actors are losing competitiveness precisely because the ICP in other countries is more capital-intensive and effective (and this plays an increasingly decisive role given the rising economic pressures). Respondents from the performing arts (focus group) argue that Flemish performing artists and companies have been 'punching above their weight' for years due to the prestige of the Flemish wave, but that for programmers, financial support in their travel, accommodation and transport costs have become more important factors in the choices they make. This is of course especially the case in countries where performance venues lack substantial funding for programming (for an overview of support for international tours in 41 Creative Europe countries, see [Research Results of Perform Europe | IETM](#)). This appears to have a major impact on the performing opportunities of Flemish producers and companies today.

- ▶ **There is a strong demand to focus on (collective) visibility for different (sub)sectors and niches. What applies more generally to the demand for export support also applies in particular to the demand from sectors to focus on (collective) visibility, in a context of more competition and protectionism on the international scene.**

There are calls for a Flemish presence at as many important sectoral hotspots as possible: biennials, showcases, fairs, etc. (this varies according to sectors and subsectors). It is also important to diversify in this regard: different subsectors and niches have specific events. In a similar vein, there are also calls to look at initiatives that focus on joint international communication (e.g., across the entire museum sector) and joint initiatives and coordination with various stakeholders (actors in the field, intermediary organisations, government bodies, such as the



Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office where there is interest in focus initiatives in the jurisdictions of the diplomatic representatives).

It is important to develop strategic and pragmatic partnerships around these types of initiatives. Various intermediary organisations work with partners at home and abroad (in particular, counterparts in French-speaking Belgium and the Netherlands) to pool capacity, resources, networks and expertise, and therefore have more heft together in competition with much larger countries with much larger budgets.

- ▶ **There is a strong demand to focus - in addition to artists - on 'supervisory' roles and the profiles in the cultural ecosystems that play an essential role as links in international networks, such as managers, translators, and curators.**

Professionalising international work also means that artists do not have to do everything themselves and have access to professional supervision. In the Arts Decree, only artists are given access to certain tools, and not the people who support them (e.g., the entourage of musicians, art workers, and curators). Nevertheless, the latter are essential links in internationalisation processes. Flanders Literature highlights the importance of translators as links in internationalisation, a profession that is sometimes poorly remunerated.

- ▶ **There is a need for new organisational and business models that capitalise on changing conditions: technological developments, economic and social shifts, and new cultural opportunities and business models. The ICP does not have any incentives for innovation in terms of business models for international visibility, promotion and distribution/dissemination.**

The rapidly changing social context (technological disruption, inclusive work, climate change, increasing competition, etc.) are putting pressure on current business models. There is a need for innovation, research and development on new, sustainable business models (and international strategies within these). Several respondents emphasized the potential of new technological developments in this regard, such as immersive technologies, virtual concerts and AI to (eventually) generate new revenue models. The rapid evolution in this field often demands significant investments that are sometimes primarily feasible for large (international) players. Besides technical issues, there are also business and legal issues, often involving the question of rights (an essential building block of revenue models). Initiatives such as Flanders Technology and Innovation and the policy for digital transformation do not offer any solution to this for the time being.

Furthermore, the cultural heritage sector highlights the challenges of earning revenue from digital content abroad. Language is a barrier: as long as online activities focus on a Dutch-speaking, domestic and smaller audience, the willingness to pay for digital content abroad remains limited, making it difficult to come up with a sustainable revenue model.

- ▶ **There is a need for flexible and easily accessible tools for international processes and projects, with short- and long-term perspectives, both large- and small-scale.**

We have previously highlighted the significant need for flexible and easily accessible tools. Just about all sectoral focus groups indicated the need for these tools and resources to create opportunities abroad (and in Flanders). Several suggestions regarding a sector-specific toolkit relate to opportunities for international performance, as well as development-oriented activities (artistic, cultural, methodological research, prospecting, and networking). Here there is a need for both small-scale, easily accessible projects with a long planning burden and rapid procedures, tailored to the sometimes different processes in the various subsectors and seed money (see the



demands within music, where planning is sometimes at very short notice). Compare also with the mobility support within Culture Moves Europe.

In addition, there is also a need for strategic breakthrough projects with a long-term perspective, ambitious budgets that focus on reputation building, network development, and knowledge building.

4.2.4 Social and networking gaps

- ▶ **Despite the fact that network development is an objective in the Strategic Framework for ICP, respondents indicated that the network dimension remains underexposed.**

Respondents highlighted the fact that the ICP is too project-oriented and that there are too few tools and instruments for network development. Nevertheless, this is an important aspect of a long-term perspective on internationalisation. Many cultural organisations are de facto highly networked at the international level. This is usually via operating grants or on their own initiative. Other actors do not (yet) have already-developed international contacts and need tools to build sustainable networks. Even well-networked artists need to continue investing in network development. Within international sectoral value networks, there is considerable staff mobility, so an international network must be maintained on a permanent basis. Respondents perceive a need for support and feel that the importance of this network dimension is given too little attention in International Cultural Policy, although the network dimension is becoming even more important in the changing context outlined above. There is a feeling that this is not visible enough in the toolkit and/or the pressure on resources puts further pressure on international networks. 'The networks are the breeding ground for durable international contacts and the driving force behind international collaborations. However, they often lack the manpower and resources to take full advantage of input from networks, to participate in exchange programmes or to explore foreign markets.' (VI.BE)

Networking is addressed in the Strategic Framework for ICP with regard to the operations of Event Flanders and the possibility of bringing international networking events to Flanders. But this too is a project-based approach to networking and does not allow actors to organise themselves into networks from a long-term perspective.

The Strategic Framework for ICP also highlights the role of Flemish general representatives, diplomatic representations of FIT and VISITFLANDERS. In principle, there is significant demand from the sectors to work more with the foreign delegations. The fact that there is a permanent international network representing the interests of Flemish actors is interesting. But respondents indicate that the foreign delegations do not always have the sector-specific relevant contacts and there is not enough time/capacity to develop these contacts.

- ▶ **There is unequal access to the tools of international cultural policy, there is a need for a more inclusive international cultural policy.**

Individuals have less access to ICP tools compared to organisations, and there is an issue as regards opportunities for emerging names rather than exclusively established talent. We observe a need for adequate support and funding for emerging voices and smaller structures. Furthermore, it can be noted that there is not enough attention to crucial parameters such as colour, gender, people with disabilities, disadvantaged people, etc. These are topics that are becoming increasingly important in international policy frameworks and key forums. In a changing society, many institutions are asking themselves who they are giving a voice and a stage to - and who not. The public (readers, spectators, visitors) and media also attach increasing importance to this aspect.



European policy frameworks, projects and networks are also putting more emphasis on inclusive working. For example, [Europe Beyond Access - disability challenging the status quo on stage | British Council](#), the largest transnational initiative focusing on opportunities for artists and audiences with disabilities. Or Keychange, which focuses on gender equality within music ([Keychange](#)). International cooperation and exchange is one way to make progress here.

- ▶ **The focus within the ICP is too much on occasional support and events, and not enough on opportunities to develop deeper and meaningful relationships, to make the impact of these projects and events longer-lasting.**

There is a general frustration that an international presence and visibility is too much a case of 'hit & run': briefly present but with no lasting impact. The resources are often lacking for preparatory and overarching activities, or initiatives aimed at valorising a given opportunity and creating impact. The opportunities in this regard by also be underexploited.

We give an example from literature. Translations are important. But respondents indicate that the responsibility for valorising and following-up lies too much with the author; the policy structure for this is still too often lacking. This (again) highlights the need for supervising trajectories, rather than a stand-alone and product-based approach. Within music, the performing arts and the circus arts, there is a need for 'slow travel' and 'slow touring', with consideration for longer runs and compact tours, where there is also more room for supervisory activities, workshops and initiatives aimed at knowledge sharing.

4.2.5 Environmental sustainability

- ▶ **The ICP still has little focus on environmental sustainability.**

Internationally, there is growing urgency regarding a more climate-conscious cultural practice. There is clearly a tension when it comes to internationalisation, especially in sectors/value chains where international mobility and distribution are important. However, sustainable/ecological touring requires necessary investments that are not always evident or feasible for (small) players. In general, within the Strategic Framework for ICP, there is still little focus on environmental sustainability. Even in the sectoral frameworks, environmental sustainability receives too little attention in relation to internationalisation. A study by IDEA Consult from 2022 ([Research Results of Perform Europe](#)) shows that the Flemish ICP is not alone in this regard, the same applies to the ICP in various countries within the scope of the Creative Europe programme. There have been more international good practices since then however, such as the European programmes Culture Moves Europe and Perform Europe, for example.

4.3. Gaps regarding strategic choices

What does the Strategic Framework say?

In line with the sector-driven and follow-the-actor approach, there are other initiatives in the International Cultural Policy. To be impactful in this regard, the Strategic Framework highlights the importance of a) making relevant strategic choices, and b) developing heft based on 'a complementary approach.' In the following two sections, we address the gaps perceived in this area, from the perspective of the cultural sectors and from the various government bodies involved in International Cultural Policy; in §4.3 in terms of the strategic choices



made (in particular, the geographical focus areas); in §4.4 in terms of the complementary cooperation between government bodies and intermediary players involved in the ICP.

Some relevant quotes from the Strategic Framework (freely translated):

- "This international cultural policy is an extension of my Flemish cultural policy and is complementary to the follow-the-actor approach that still typifies the sectoral cultural decrees and their international support instruments. By setting priorities, within the budgetary context, I want to demonstrate heft and work in a coherent, sustainable and impactful way." (p. 1)
- "The policy benefits from continuity and long-term vision. This is especially the case for international policy. Indeed, building international contacts, reciprocal relationships and networks requires time investment and sustained effort. To focus as much as possible on partnerships and mutual commitments, we are working with a list of priority countries and regions." (p. 5)
- In short, the Strategic Framework for ICP seeks to derive clout and sustainability from geographic priorities while remaining open to new developments and opportunities. "The geographic framework provides focus in the policy endeavours, without losing sight of the reality that relevant developments are occurring outside the focus areas. From this perspective, the focus leaves room to explore new scenes and capitalise on opportunities." (p. 5-6)

What gaps are perceived in this area?

4.3.1 General

- ▶ **Despite the existence of the Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy, with its substantiated (geographical) choices, the strategic choices are perceived as lacking transparency and being too ad hoc. It is often not clear to stakeholders how concrete choices (e.g., international projects, ad hoc grants, missions) relate to the strategy described in the Strategic Framework.**

Despite the existence of the Strategic Framework for ICP, choices are perceived as being too ad hoc. The sectors highlight a lack of transparency. The Strategic Framework does however include a list of focus areas. Nevertheless, when specific choices are made about who can participate in missions, who can qualify for ad hoc grants within the framework of cultural diplomacy or support from the Diplomatic Representation abroad, or when specific complementary initiatives are taken from within culture, it is not clear exactly on what vision, procedures and principles these choices are based. There are no clear criteria for supporting projects. There is a demand for transparency and clarity about the bases of decisions regarding which projects are supported and which are not.

4.3.2 Geographic focus areas

What does the Strategic Framework say?

For the choice of countries and regions, the strategic framework gives 'various reasons' as a starting point: the artistic and economic opportunities for the Flemish cultural and creative sectors; the importance of the cultural scene in the country; the priorities of Flemish foreign policy and historical and social ties.

This then boils down to the following focus areas (freely translated): "the French and German-speaking Community; the neighbouring countries (the Netherlands, Germany, France and the United Kingdom) and Ireland; strong regions such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, Scotland and Wales; the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) and the Baltic States (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania); Italy and Austria; the major North



American cities, which are obviously an important export destination for the arts, but due to the size and nature of the market (strong Anglo-Saxon focus) are mainly feasible for more established actors; South Africa, as a long-term partner country where culture is an important part of the cooperation; Morocco, where the cooperation around the Flemish-Moroccan house of culture Darna can provide a starting point for other dossiers.

All jurisdictions of the Diplomatic Representations of Flanders also belong to the geographical focus, even if they are not included in the above list." (p. 5) Within the Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy, the other communities in Belgium, including the French Community, are a focus area.

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **The choice of geographic focus areas is perceived by the sectors as not always relevant and as lacking in flexibility. Strengthening the international position and presence of cultural goods, actors and practices requires flexibility and a tailored approach.**

Criticism of the focus areas includes a lack of transparency and consultation in the selection of geographic priorities, whereby it is called into question whether the focus areas - especially when the justifications are more geopolitical - correspond to the real needs and interests of the sectors. However, these cannot be so easily identified. For example, geographical hotspots may differ according to artistic disciplines, genres and niches - with sectoral hotspots (Avignon, Milan, New York, Venice, etc.) sometimes differing by sector. But even within the sectors, there are different visions of which regions are important, what the policy needs to focus on, and what principles and rationales guide them.

Behind the criticisms and justifications for certain focus areas are highly different needs, economic as well as cultural and social.

- Some parties advocate focusing on economically strong regions. The question is then, for example, why Asia, a potentially important market in certain sectors, is completely left out.
- Others argue for a rationale that includes societal relevance (for example, the link to migration history), or other opportunities in terms of knowledge sharing, inspiration and content-related interests. Morocco is listed as a focus area, but there are other relevant regions that can be inspiring for artists, musicians, designers, or heritage in light of the provenance of collections and shared histories, but which may be overlooked.
- Ecological motivations lead to the suggestion that distance should also be a justification in a geographical consideration framework and, for example, to focus on neighbouring countries and regions rather than on other continents. On the other hand, in a globalising society, the international horizon cannot be confined to Western Europe.
- A tailored approach is sometimes called for, which takes into account diversification not only at the level of niches, but even at the level of oeuvres and productions. What is the most appropriate market and target audience for this specific documentary, dance production or poetry compilation, which has the potential to appeal to an international audience? When making strategic choices, isn't it appropriate to start more from *market demand*, rather than supply? In which markets is there potential for a specific strong and unique 'Flemish' offering or specific album or book? Is there any evidence of this from data (e.g., streaming platforms?). For example (freely translated): "We work with prototypes - certain series would do well in US but not in Asia and vice versa." (interview with Flanders Audiovisual Fund)
- There are also calls for a focus on countries from current specific (Flemish) themes and where there is an interest to exchange expertise with foreign partners/countries where those themes have been high on the



agenda for some time. These range from cultural education, diversity and inclusion, to other content-related and/or current societal issues as well. Flanders can of course also profile itself as an exemplary region on specific themes and/or subsectors/aspects.

The intermediary players and the field de facto handle the geographical focus areas pragmatically. Some focus areas are so self-evident that there is no discussion about them in the sector. This is clearly the case for collaborating in/with neighbouring countries, but also for a number of international metropolises. It will often be explored pragmatically which opportunities are available within cooperation agreements or other windows of opportunity (e.g., the Brexit Adjustment Reserve). If an opportunity presents itself, intermediary actors and actors in the field will consider how it might be meaningful for the work.

The focus on the circus arts in France lends itself to a focus on visibility, networking with an eye on performance opportunities, given the large circus market in France. In the run-up to an assessment, the DCYM's International Aspects Team looks positively at Focus France, a pilot project aimed at promoting the circus arts in France. This [pilot](#) emerged in the context of the Corona pandemic, and had a specific focus on one sector in one country. Pending a final assessment, staff at the DCYM already consider the project successful, with the involvement of all relevant parties, including the sector itself, the diplomatic representation and the centre of expertise. But it was also stated that this was a one-off project, and that it is difficult to graft future initiatives onto it. The project was useful and valuable for the specific sector targeted, but there are questions as to whether it is relevant for the broader sector.

In turn, the opportunities offered by the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR) were used to a large extent to share knowledge between Flemish actors and the UK regarding inclusivity and diversity, both within the circus and the broader performing arts. The initiatives around the BAR are seen by many as a good practice example regarding the collaboration between different government departments and intermediary organisations to strengthen and mobilise the sector around geographical and thematic priorities. As additional resources for culture also came within this framework, programmes could be created where intermediary organisations and cultural diplomacy worked together with additional resources. In consultation, these collaborations had a strong focus on themes such as diversity of opinion and inclusive working, where there was a mutual interest among actors in the field to share expertise. Based on research and working visits in the UK, for example, Flanders Arts Institute "has identified strengths in the British cultural sector that are also relevant in Flanders: [sustainability](#), [art and disability](#) and [cross-sectoral practices \(art and health/well-being\)](#)." [\(Re\)Connect with the UK: connect with arts professionals and organisations in the UK | Flanders Arts Institute](#)

- ▶ **French-speaking Belgium and the German Community are considered focus areas in the ICP, with similar status to other focus areas abroad. Cooperation agreements with project calls encourage better international exchange within Belgium. But on top of that, there is strong demand in the structure of intermediary organisations to be able to collaborate flexibly with French-speaking counterparts in initiatives aimed at promotion and networking, in order to generate more impact together.**

Finally, it is striking that in many sectors the intra-community, Belgian/French-speaking market is hardly catered to. 'Working internationally' seems to go smoother outside Belgium than between communities in Belgium. Policy-related obstacles sometimes get in the way. For example, Flanders Literature cannot grant subsidies to a Flemish publisher who publishes a Walloon author. Various literary organisations in Brussels are nonetheless active in this multilingual market, at least in Brussels, both in terms of creators and audiences (e.g. Passa Porta, deBuren).

In the context of a cultural cooperation agreement between the Flemish and French Communities, the DCYM and the Administration Générale de la Culture organise an annual project call for cooperation between Flemish and



French-speaking cultural organisations (cultuurculture)<https://www.cultuurculture.be/>. The project call is underpinned by a collaborative platform with experts from both parts of the country. We observe positive experiences with these opportunities by those who have experience with them, but it is definitely advisable to make them more widely known in the sector. A call is also launched every year for similar cooperation projects between organisations from the Flemish and German-speaking communities.

There is a need for pragmatic partnerships with Wallonie-Bruxelles in promoting work abroad. Despite the fact there is a cooperation agreement with the French Community, there is a need for pragmatic cooperation within Belgium.

- For various reasons, Flanders Arts Institute works pragmatically with French-speaking counterparts, for example around 'Belgian photography.'
- Under the banner of Belgium is Design, Flanders DC, MAD Brussels and Wallonie-Bruxelles Design Mode have a joint presence at fairs. See [Belgium is design](#): "The BELGIUM IS DESIGN project promotes Belgian design around the world and is an initiative of 3 institutions: Flanders DC, MAD – Home of Creators and Wallonie-Bruxelles Design Mode. Active since 2011, this joint approach fosters and develops initiatives to highlight Belgian designers, manufacturers and producers in international markets."
- Belgium Booms is a collaboration between VI.BE (Flanders) and Wallonie-Bruxelles Musiques (Wallonia), with the support of Sabam for Culture and PlayRight+. See [Belgium Booms](#). And from a recent report of a workshop on international music policy (freely translated): "Our state structure is what it is, but this community fragmentation is a handicap when it comes to foreign countries. The preference is for a Belgian export agency with a Flemish and Walloon wing. That way, we could address the outside world with a single Belgian brand, without prejudice to the competences of the communities." ([ingredien-ten-voor-de-toekomst-van-vlaamse-muziek-in-het-buitenland-1-.pdf \(vi.be\)](#))
- Flanders Literature has also set up collaborations with French-speaking partners, including in the context of a public fair (Flirt Flamand)
- Heritage also likes to work with French-speaking partners, but this is not always successful (for similar reasons above); at the very least, there are regular exchanges with federal cultural heritage organisations.

There are various motivations behind these collaborations. Pooling resources and know-how generates impact, the language border is sometimes highly porous, and a bigger impact can be achieved with a stronger portfolio. There is a search for a brand that has impact abroad, and in this regard, a Belgium-related label can also capitalise on existing perceptions abroad. On this point, the different objectives in the Strategic Framework for ICP - on the one hand, strengthening the visibility of specific actors, on the other hand, putting Flanders on the map - are at odds with each other.

- ▶ **Even in a changing society and in light of far-reaching sectoral developments, there are good arguments for continuing priority cooperation with the Netherlands. It is important to engage in both cultural exchange within the Dutch language area, in a way that capitalises on the developments highlighted in the previous chapter: how can Flemish and Dutch International Cultural Policy cooperate (pragmatically) in a multilingual and superdiverse society, in which cultural value chains are also globalising?**

There are obvious reasons why the Netherlands should also be seen as a priority partner in international cultural policy. Actors in the field look for collaboration for various reasons: language, proximity, common heritage aspects or a business need to work on a larger scale (such as film distribution cooperation or playing opportunities for live performing arts and music in the Netherlands). Intermediary actors also typically work closely with their Dutch counterparts, with a view to knowledge sharing and exchanging practice.



Collaboration is of course best suited for language-related sectors. Within literature, there is an obvious and far-reaching collaboration between the two literary funds. Moreover, the cooperation between Flanders Literature and the Dutch Foundation for Literature is perceived as asymmetrical. Budgets are much larger in the Netherlands, meaning that the relationship is asymmetrical in any case.

Within the ICP, there is a specific focus on the Netherlands that can be seen in structural support for various, specific initiatives, from a structural partnership with the Dutch government and Dutch cultural policy. Examples include De Brakke Grond in Amsterdam (funding by DCYM, and partly also Flemish Foreign Policy, but with many Dutch fund project grants), deBuren (funding by DCYM and the Dutch OCW and Foreign Affairs), Taalunie - Union for the Dutch Language, or Ons Erfdeel (largely DCYM, and to a limited extent OCW).

An important question is how these bilateral initiatives position themselves in a changing cultural and social context, in which, on the one hand, specific impulses for the Flemish-Dutch exchange can be justified for the above-mentioned reasons and, on the other hand, international cooperation has also increasingly developed on multinational and transnational lines. Take, for example, the position of Dutch-language literature in the context of online retail, developed by multinationals on platforms where the original language is less important. Moreover, much more use can be made of the 'local' expertise of the above-mentioned organisations (in terms of knowledge of the demand side, press/media, new trends, potential opportunities, expertise exchange, etc.).

4.3.3 Knowledge-based policy development

What does the Strategic Framework say?

The Strategic Framework for ICP does not address the need for monitoring and evaluation of developments in internationalisation and international cultural policy.

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **The ICP is not evidence-based enough. Data collection and analysis are important to create overview for actors in the field and as a foundation to inform vision development and the elaboration of the ICP, monitor and evaluate the ICP. There is a need for both qualitative and quantitative monitoring as well as regular analysis and translation to the sector and adaptation of the strategy, so that actors can learn together about international developments in a rapidly changing social context. But there is no robust data collection and up-to-date analyses. The lack of capacity and fragmented remits and/or lack of specific remits within the structure of intermediary organisations are the reason why.**

Data collection and analysis are important to create overview for actors in the field and as a foundation to inform vision development and the elaboration of the ICP, monitor and evaluate the ICP. There are hardly any up-to-date overviews available at the sectoral level, of which actors are active abroad and what developments are taking place at the international level. There are however various sectoral support centres working on landscape drawings, with internationalisation being a knowledge theme. The DCYM itself also has data on operating and project grants, and TVL also has project grant information related to international operations abroad and in Flanders, but it is not clear whether these are monitored and/or further analysed.

Currently, there is no robust data set that collects data (ideally comparable and from a long-term monitoring perspective) on the internationalisation of cultural activities. Relevant data is however available for the various subsectors. For example, in annual reports, newsletters, the monitoring of domestic and foreign press, etc. But these data are rarely translated into insights and trend analyses that can nurture the further development of



international cultural policy, let alone systematic monitoring with a long-term perspective (cf. the [database/ vh Buitengaats](#) of Dutch Culture or the [Cultuurmonitor van de Boekmanstichting](#)).

Intermediary actors indicate that this is not part of their core remit and/or that they lack the capacity to focus on this more intensely. However, one interesting practice is that of the Support Centre for Non-Formal Adult Education (Socius), where there is systematic screening of policy plans and policy reporting - also with a view to internationalisation - of recognised socio-cultural associations ([Stromen in de civiele samenleving](#)). And from Flanders Arts Institute, tapping sustainable (going back decades) datasets on performing arts productions and CVs of visual artists with recurring intervals to map international developments - to inform discussions within sector and policy ([Re/framing the international | Flanders Arts Institute](#), [Cijferboek Kunsten 2018 | Flanders Arts Institute](#)).

Flanders Literature and Flanders Audiovisual Fund have an overview of all their grants (also online, see e.g. , but do not analyse them or analyse them only to a limited extent; ostensibly, FARO does have a mandate to manage a [project database](#), but in practice this is merely 'ticking' an option when applying for a project grant (from DCYM). The information is not further analysed.

There is also a need here to make greater use of data collected on digital platforms. There are interesting experiments in this area, although these run into limits. Flanders Arts Institute and V.I.B.E work with WBM (Wallonie-Bruxelles Musique) on *Have Love Will Travel*, a data tool mapping the international presence of music from Belgium, which monitors developments and helps actors in the field develop their strategies. But it is proving increasingly difficult to reuse data from commercial platforms.

Data collection that can inform policy is ideally not only quantitative. It is also important that actors can learn together about international developments in a rapidly changing social context. It may be interesting to create a joint learning environment for government and intermediary actors in the area of international work. There are interesting practical examples here as well. For example, Flanders Arts Institute organises regular information meetings on internationalisation and (sometimes) reports on them on the site. Individuals or organisations participating in working visits share what they learned with Flanders Arts Institute and online.

Furthermore, it is not only about mapping developments abroad, but also about getting a picture of developments (actors, goods, practices, expertise) in Flanders with potential to bolster the objectives of international cultural policy. See also this comment in the Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage (freely translated): "The existing international structures and key players are often insufficiently known. Many cultural heritage organisations are well-networked internationally and take on international mandates, but there is no systematic overview of this. (...) In terms of knowledge sharing, it is still important to follow up on international evolutions and bring expertise into Flanders." ([Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage \(vlaanderen.be\)](#), p. 44)

4.4. The cooperation between and within government and intermediary organisations

4.4.1 General

What does the Strategic Framework say?

The Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy seeks to develop clout from the fact that strategic choices are made that also guide the various actors involved in implementing International Cultural Policy (freely



translated): "International cultural policy guides both the activities initiated by the government itself and the activities of the intermediary organisations." (p. 3) Furthermore, the minister indicates that all partners contribute "from their own mission and objectives" (p. 6):

- "Close coordination between the various government actors and between the government and intermediary organisations is essential in order to be reinforcing. The departments DCYM and the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, together with the agencies FIT and VISITFLANDERS, jointly focus on making all tools coherent, so that the deployment of Flemish cultural actors, goods and practices in an international context, in addition to visibility, reputation and touristic or economic value, also encourages the building of sustainable cultural networks. To this end, they worked out a cooperation framework."
- "Structural coordination with the intermediary organisations takes place both individually and jointly. In cooperation with the intermediary organisations, the governments set up pathways for the expansion (or deepening) of international relations and collaborations." (p. 3).

The desired cooperation between government bodies is developed in a 'cooperation framework.' The departments DCYM and the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, together with the agencies FIT and VISITFLANDERS, jointly focus on making all tools coherent, so that the deployment of Flemish cultural actors, goods and practices in an international context, in addition to visibility, reputation and touristic or economic value, also encourages the building of sustainable cultural networks. To this end, they worked out a cooperation framework." (Source: Strategic framework for ICP). The "Cooperation Framework between the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office and the agencies Flanders Investment & Trade and VISITFLANDERS" defines three engagements: structural planning consultation, operational cooperation and joint position-taking.

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **Despite the fact that the Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy highlights the 'complementary approach' and 'coordination' as key focal points - while respecting the core missions of all parties - this point is perceived as a major gap by all involved. Various initiatives have been phased out and there is a need to give new elan to these consultations.**

This includes both coordination between the various government bodies (DCYM, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, FIT and VISITFLANDERS), coordination within the system of intermediary organisations in the culture field (including the involvement of actors in the field in International Cultural Policy) and coordination between the intermediary actors and the various government bodies.

The calls for coordination are nothing new. This was also a concern 10 to 15 years ago. In 2010 and 2011, the centres of expertise for the arts, and the funds, organised a process entitled *Joining the dots* on the 'building blocks for a sustainable international arts policy'. Cooperation and coordination between the intermediary organisations and relevant government organisations/policy areas was a focus point in this regard. Around the same time, various government initiatives were also taken, including a structural consultation at the management level between the various policy areas. A paper on international cultural policy by Joke Schauvliege called for the creation of a CINT (Cell International Cultural Policy).

The centres of expertise for the arts worked on Arts Flanders, a platform for international coordination within the arts and collaboration with relevant policy areas. Arts Flanders was broadened into Flanders Culture, with also FARO and VKC around the table, 'a collaboration between the Flemish Government and cultural centres of expertise and funds on Flemish cultural initiatives abroad. The aim is to encourage international cultural cooperation and increase the visibility of Flemish art, culture and heritage. A central database 'plantool' compiles the planned activities, but is only accessible to partners." ([Homepage | Flanders Culture](#)) The plantool was



intended to ensure that all actors involved could exchange information about longer-term plans and activities, so that chances and opportunities for cooperation could be seized on more effectively.

However, we see that many of these initiatives have since been phased out.

Flanders Culture is no longer operational. The momentum has stalled on issues related to data collection within the planning tool, as it is proving difficult to collect the necessary data to achieve the objective of coordination. However, there is still a need for coordination of the various plannings.

- Both intermediary actors and government bodies highlight the fact that coordination is difficult and initiatives have been phased out.
- According to the Strategic Framework, the DCYM is expected to assume a coordinating role. Limited staff capacity at the International Aspects Team within DCYM limits opportunities for coordination. The search for collaboration and synergy with other policy areas and government requires capacity that is not currently available. (Interview with DCYM)

4.4.2 Collaboration with the intermediary organisations

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **There is a need for active coordination between government bodies and the intermediary organisations (individually and jointly), both in terms of strategy development and implementation. There is generally no systematic approach in this area currently.**

We observe from the various sectoral intermediary organisations - and also collectively - the wish to be more involved in the development of international cultural policy, both in terms of strategy design and implementation. The possibilities in this regard vary from sector to sector. For example, in drafting their multi-year plans, the funds have a) consultation with the government on objectives in relation to their overall budget and b) ongoing consultation with sector representatives regarding their strategy. In the other sectors, this interaction between sector and policy is less streamlined. Sectoral 'landscape drawings' (where internationalisation is a theme) and strategic vision notes are increasingly used. However, the approach is not consistent across sectors, as noted above (4.1.1).

Specific projects and initiatives under the ICP do result in operational cooperation between the DCYM and the cultural system of intermediary organisations. For example, the focus on the circus arts in France, the Flemish presence at the Venice Biennale and now the initiatives in the context of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve.

Government agencies can benefit if there is agreement within subsectors on shared internationalisation priorities. It is not clear how such a consensus should come about. Sectoral support centres do have a good knowledge of developments in the field, but it is not the case that they 'represent the sector'. A number of sectors do have a single advocacy group that can be involved in internationalisation (e.g. FLEGA, for games). Various advocacy groups are active in many sectors. There are initiatives that seek to respond to this. At the end of 2022, a working group on Internationalisation was started within the Music Consultation (a consultation of the various interests within the music sector). "The goal is to create a supported and strategic plan for the internationalisation of the music sector and feed into International Cultural Policy." "Internationalisation is high on the priority list of many stakeholders in the sector, but there is still no clear, unified voice that can inform music policy." [The future of Flemish music abroad: key insights | News | VI.BE](#)



It is observed within the DCYM that there are divergent views within the system of intermediary organisations regarding the rationale and significance of working internationally (interview with DCYM) and that coordination is needed here. The International Aspects Team states that more coordination is also needed within the DCYM between staff within cross-cutting and sectoral teams, and with the Media policy department. This can also improve consistency within sectoral international cultural policies.

4.4.3 Collaboration between government bodies

4.4.3.1 Cultural diplomacy/ Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office

Outline of the policy framework

The objectives of Flemish foreign policy is to invest fully in an ambitious, impactful and coherent international policy that promotes the interests, prosperity and well-being of Flemish citizens. In addition, the policy aims to improve the competitive position of Flemish businesses, position Flanders as a strong knowledge economy worldwide and attract foreign investors to Flanders. The ambition is to make Flanders an undisputed reference in Europe in the 2020s, both economically and socially, with a specific focus on comparison with societies such as the Netherlands and Scandinavia. (Source: Policy memorandum 2019-2024: Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation, p. 5)

Within this policy, Flanders attaches great importance to the cultural dimension in its international relations. The objectives of Flemish cultural diplomacy are described as follows:

- ▶ Support the cultural sector and creative industries where useful in their international ambitions and networking with a view to promoting cooperation and exchange,
- ▶ use the reach of the Flemish arts and heritage sector as an instrument to strengthen Flanders' international name recognition and reputation,
- ▶ consider culture as a vector of values in the international relations of Flanders and the European Union,
- ▶ promote mutual understanding and trust in relations with foreign countries." (Source: [Culture | Flanders Chancellery & Foreign Office \(fdfa.be\)](https://www.fdfa.be/culture))

The tools to achieve this are:

- ▶ Diplomatic representation: "The Department of Foreign Affairs plays a bridging role between the broad cultural civil society and the diplomatic network of the Government of Flanders." [Culture | Flanders Chancellery & Foreign Office \(fdfa.be\)](https://www.fdfa.be/culture) The various diplomatic representations can help support and often also have a great knowledge and network of the cultural sector in their jurisdiction.
- ▶ Postings: "Postings by the Minister-President support the sector in international development." This aligns with the objective in the SF ICP: "Strengthen and deepen (existing) relationships with leading organisations and institutions." (Strategic framework for ICP, p. 3)
- ▶ Projects of cultural diplomacy: "that either promote the shared interests of cultural sector and government or promote relations with other countries through the exchange of ideas, values or traditions."

Policy memorandum 2019-2024: Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation, (p. 43) highlights the following key focal points: "Recognition and acknowledgement come from repetition and recollection. Flanders therefore presents itself as it has traditionally been known in the world: as a trading nation, as a maritime nation, and as a centre of culture, heritage, and innovation. I ask my departments in charge of foreign policy and culture to propose to me, in close cooperation, cultural initiatives that showcase Flanders as State of the Art in the most

interesting places abroad. We do this using our cultural highlights (Masters) from past and present." ([32213 \(vlaanderen.be\)](https://32213.vlaanderen.be))

An updated framework for 'cultural and academic diplomacy', which proposes an 'improved approach', is currently being developed. "We are focusing on a longer term, more focus per year and per jurisdiction, in consultation with the most relevant stakeholders inside and outside the Flemish government. This approach can be applied in any case to the spending of funds from the operating budget of the foreign delegations, and ideally eventually also for ad hoc grants, in consultation with the new cabinet that will take office in 2024." (Source: Memorandum - Management framework for cultural & academic diplomacy projects, 9 November 2023, p. 1)

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **There is a perception in the cultural sectors (actors in the field and the system of intermediary organisations) that Flemish cultural diplomacy is primarily ad hoc, as can be seen in limited transparency in selections regarding missions, the allocation of ad hoc grants and the mobilisation of foreign delegations.**

There is an impression that opportunities for support from Diplomatic Representations fluctuate widely and depend on personal contacts and interests of the representatives. There is a need for more networking and consultation with Flemish representation, both with the cultural system of intermediary organisations as well as more familiarity and awareness with the sectors themselves. The 2020 Policy Commission noted that the cultural heritage field is not yet sufficiently well known among Flemish representatives. There has been an initial introduction, but this must be structurally laid down. Conversely, actors in the field are often unfamiliar with the options available to them.

- Some intermediary organisations players indicate good relationships with e.g. cultural diplomacy, for others the relationship seems more distant. There is sometimes talk of a 'direct line', but there is no mention of any 'structural consultation'. The Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office does have the reflex to contact intermediary organisations and the DCYM when opportunities arise (for example, in the context of missions).
- With respect to the diplomatic representations, there are significant differences among them: those in neighbouring countries (France, UK, Netherlands) seem to have slightly higher budgetary clout than others to respond to concrete opportunities (or are more likely to allocate budgets to culture).
- ▶ **On the one hand, the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office wants to be able to respond flexibly and ad hoc to opportunities and chances for cooperation as they arise within specific situations and contexts. On the other hand, DKBZA is also asking to work more from a long-term perspective, for example by determining longer-term focal themes on which diplomatic representations can focus. Setting out lines with well-defined choices could advance the goals of cultural diplomacy. This approach is at odds with the current bottom-up approach.**

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy (Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office), we note the following points.

- In the context of cultural diplomacy, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office primarily handles ad hoc grants, depending on the priorities of the Minister's office, with the possibility of joint project calls. The tools also include operating budgets for diplomatic representations, missions and visitor programmes, with the latter often serving broader purposes than just cultural aspects.



- Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office does not have any key focal points in this regard and makes choices depending on specific opportunities in specific situations, partly based on discussions with foreign delegations and the intermediary organisations. The total budget allocated to ad hoc grants for cultural diplomacy varies in size over the years: between €657,000 and €1.16 million, between 15 and 25 cultural projects per year.
- Mutual knowledge, resources and personnel at both diplomatic representations, and at the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office are a barrier to cultural diplomacy. General Representatives often work with limited teams of 2-3 people for all Flemish competencies. There is a lack of structural consultation and no clear top-down guidelines in the policy of DKBUZA. However, given the objectives of cultural diplomacy, the focus is primarily on arts and heritage. Social-cultural work and amateur arts are less on the radar. Personal engagement appears to be an important driver; for example, it can be seen on social media that there has been a lot of focus on art, talent development and heritage in Paris lately (including UNESCO).
- It is not always possible for outsiders to follow the choices. Annual reports are for internal use and there are internal ex post facto analyses on cultural diplomacy, from which certain lines emerge after the fact (see above). Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office's website gave an overview of selected projects, but it is not currently up-to-date due to the merger of departments.
- Within DKBUZA, we see the value of being able to work "ad hoc" and make choices. At the same time, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office is also asking to work more from a long-term perspective, for example by determining longer-term focal themes on which diplomatic representations can focus. Setting out lines with well-defined choices could advance the goals of cultural diplomacy.
- The demand for exchange in terms of planning is still strong from government bodies (e.g., including diplomatic representations).
- As for DKBUZA's relationship with sectors and the related consultation, collaboration is mainly through individual contact with centres of expertise and funds. Sometimes there is also direct contact with actors in the field. There is currently no joint consultation between DKBUZA and centres of expertise and funds, and bilateral consultation seems more relevant to them than multilateral consultation.

As such, these are the main options within the 'improved approach' to public diplomacy, which is currently in full swing:

"The current approach has room for improvement, with attention to the following points:

- Replicate good practices and initiatives that exist in the various delegations
- Less of an ad hoc approach and more planned, longer-term operations for more impact
- Stronger content-related focus and prioritising
- Clearer assessment criteria, formats and practical supervision
- Need for continued coordination and information exchange between DKBUZA and stakeholders"

(Source: *Memorandum - Management framework for cultural & academic diplomacy projects*, 9 November 2023, p. 1)

- ▶ **There is a tension between the rationales of the DCYM and Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office: the tension between a cultural and an instrumental rationale is in parallel with the tension between a top-down versus a bottom-up approach. There is a desire at Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office for a more top-down approach in addition to the existing bottom-up approach, which from their perspective (especially given**



its limited resources) is rather seen as an obstacle. Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office seeks long-term planning on well-defined selections and clear anchor points around which diplomatic representation can be mobilised.

The missions policy is ultimately decided on by Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, sometimes resulting in programmes with cultural components that are perceived as less relevant from a cultural perspective. It is stressed that the cultural sector could be more involved in the dialogue prior to missions to ensure that cultural projects actually contribute to the interests and goals of the cultural sector. The DCYM says it wants to play a coordinating role in this regard, but has too few levers (operating resources) to weigh in on choices. Both Departments are looking for a long-term vision with anchor points.

4.4.3.2 VISITFLANDERS

What does the policy framework say?

In *Flora et Labora* (2021), VISITFLANDERS' policy vision is formulated as follows (freely translated): "We want to strengthen the positive power of tourism to enable Flanders to blossom as an innovative, inspiring and high-quality travel destination in a way that benefits its residents, entrepreneurs and visitors. Tourism is no longer an end in itself, but a means to create added value for all stakeholders in a destination. If we are successful, then Flanders will flourish, like the crown of a healthy tree." (Source: [Flora et Labora](#)).

The Flemish policy vision on tourism, [Reizen naar Morgen](#) (Travel to Tomorrow), was translated - in cocreative consultation with stakeholders - into a thematic approach to develop tourism sustainably. "We are focusing on the intense experience of a place, combined with meaningful encounters and the activities or travel format. In this regard, we do not focus on specific cities or regions, but develop Flanders-wide narratives within the six themes, which we spread out in space and time." In particular, 'heritage experience' is one of these themes. "VISITFLANDERS wants to strengthen, make more visible and connect numerous heritage sites and experiences during this legislature. This is through five narratives. The narratives around the Flemish Masters, castles and gardens and the development of an overarching heritage network are given priority." (*Flora et labora*, 27)

Other cultural sectors may fall under the theme of 'Conferences and events'.

- Conferences of international associations (associations) offer a wealth of opportunities to connect visitors with the place, its residents and entrepreneurs. Moreover, we give preference to conferences that offer potential for long-term positive impact." (*Flora et Labora*, 43)
- "EventFlanders ensures coordination in this regard. This unit was set up within VISITFLANDERS during the past policy period, under the direction of the ministers responsible for Foreign Affairs, Culture, Sports and Tourism." (Tourism Policy Plan 2019-2024)
- On 11 June 2019, the EventFlanders steering committee set the priorities for the rollout of the cultural major event policy. During the Culture Committee meeting on 7 February 2020, these choices were also accounted for by the Minister-President of the Government of Flanders. Four priorities are identified:
- Roll out of Flemish top exhibitions policy; Embed a contemporary arts festival of European/ international reference level in Flanders; Organise cultural events as a lever for regional development; Focus on calendar events (e.g. reopening of KMSKA).

Additional opportunities arose during the Corona period. "In 2022, over €18.5 million of recovery support was awarded to 80 projects. These revolved around the themes of recreational and competitive cycling, beer experiences, Flemish Masters, nature (recreational hiking and rural and nature tourism) and culinary experiences." (Annual Report 2022 VISITFLANDERS, 9).



VISITFLANDERS has diplomatic representations, which "roll out global and cross-market campaigns and set up region-specific market activities that contribute to the reputation, economic and value-added objectives of each theme." (Diplomatic Representations | [VISITFLANDERS](#)).

With the strong emphasis on heritage, it is not surprising that the Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage refers to VISITFLANDERS and Event Flanders: "heritage, both cultural and immovable, is a large part of Flanders' appeal. It is an appeal that Event Flanders, the partnership between Culture, Tourism and Sport around international events, is also capitalising on. By supporting and developing important heritage events, such as major exhibitions, our heritage has reach far beyond our borders. The international reach is important, and we are delighted to welcome international visitors in particular. Nevertheless, maximising the number of visitors should not be the only goal: there must be a balance between the capacity of the heritage and the environment, and the sustainability of reaching the target audience. The longer-term impact must be taken into account." (Strategic Vision Paper on Cultural Heritage)

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ The relationship with VISITFLANDERS is regarded as important and relevant, especially from a cultural heritage perspective. From both the sector and VISITFLANDERS, the need for coordination and consultation was highlighted. It seems that it is not easy to achieve cooperation with a 'win-win' regarding each party's objectives. The heritage field feels that support from Tourism is not based (or not enough) on a heritage rationale.

Not surprisingly, in the context of our research, the relations with tourism are themed primarily from the perspective of cultural heritage. In other sectors, collaborating with tourism is barely a theme, if at all.

In principle, VISITFLANDERS does not have a toolkit that offers a solution to calls for support for the internationalisation of the sector. As a result, cooperation is not always considered relevant. VISITFLANDERS' so-called Recovery projects are an exception in this regard. In the past, there were leverage projects from VISITFLANDERS that enabled museums to carry out infrastructure works. With the corona support (including from VISITFLANDERS) the necessary additional funds have also been found internationally for heritage through project funding (recovery projects), but apparently without coordination with intermediary organisations (<https://toerismevlaanderen.be/nl/subsidies/relanceoproepen#aanvraag>)

It was already observed in 2016 (in *Volop inzetten op musea. Eerste visienota Overleg Vlaamse Musea*. 2016, FARO) that (freely translated): "The largest budgets for international projects are with our colleagues at VISITFLANDERS. Currently, Flemish museums are not sufficiently able to participate in international and European projects and/or produce larger projects with an international reach themselves because they have neither the resources nor the infrastructure. The largest budgets for international projects are with our VISITFLANDERS colleagues, and to a lesser extent with Flanders International and Flanders Trade & Investment (albeit more fragmented here)." And the Advisory committee on Cultural Heritage states (freely translated): "VISITFLANDERS already provides a lot of resources to the cultural heritage sector. However, the purpose of these subsidies is often still insufficiently aligned with the objectives of cultural heritage." ([Policy Advice Cultural Heritage](#), p. 14) The resources are primarily focused on museums. For the archive sector, for example, this is not a solution.

- ▶ VISITFLANDERS is willing to collaborate with the cultural sectors, especially cultural heritage, from the current policy strategy. There is a perception that it is difficult to mobilise the cultural sectors around its



objectives, and there are indications that a lack of coordination and willingness to collaborate within the sectors is a barrier to taking concrete, joint initiatives.

VISITFLANDERS' perspective regarding its own toolkit:

- VISITFLANDERS's approach is highly strategic, with consideration for vision development, knowledge building, etc.
- VISITFLANDERS takes a project-based and thematic approach, previously more region-oriented, focusing on themes such as art and nature experiences. Although there are no open calls for project grants, there have been project calls in the past related to infrastructure and events, such as the upgrading of the Gravensteen in Ghent and major exhibitions.
- VISITFLANDERS has decided not to build new networks but seeks cooperation between existing networks, with the principle of supporting and improving existing initiatives.
- While there is interest in design, architecture, and contemporary art, VISITFLANDERS stresses the need to make choices and not open up everything. There was a clear choice to focus on the old masters. VISITFLANDERS indicates that choices still need to be made, given the limited resources and personnel (with the exception of recovery projects).
- In the United Kingdom, there is work on so-called 'climate action zones'. These are zones where collaboration from various perspectives takes place around specific themes, such as vacant shopping streets with important real estate heritage, where the arts sector can be involved.

The major events policy and operations of Event Flanders:

- The major events policy was born out of the need for economic growth and job creation, in response to terrorist attacks in Belgium in 2016. Event Flanders' model was inspired by Event Scotland. It is jointly managed by VISITFLANDERS, the DCYM and also Sport Vlaanderen. These stakeholders work together around shared goals. This model could also be applied to international cultural policy.
- The initial focus was: bringing international events to Flanders. A methodology was developed for event selection (including a focus on enhancing Flanders' reputation, fitting into the existing infrastructure, etc.). The World Choir Games aimed to promote the amateur arts and mobilise the industry around a major event. This mobilisation failed, partly because of the corona crisis, for which the events sector was unprepared. Lessons for the future include the need for extensive preliminary research, good financial arrangements with rights holders and also consideration for the long-term effects.
- A second line of Event Flanders is to strengthen existing events in Flanders. Flanders' reputation as an art region presents opportunities. Connection between existing events (e.g. West Flanders arts festivals, or other avenues to be explored) is seen as an interesting avenue and could in principle lead to scaling up in terms of budget, artistic content and mutual learning, etc. These events may also contribute to a wider spread of tourism in Flanders.

Regarding collaboration with sector and intermediary organisations:

- VISITFLANDERS notes that they continue to pursue cooperation with the sector, for example through the Flemish Museum Consultation. However, it is also noted that there seems to be no coordination or planning within the museums, meaning that collaboration is difficult.
- "Bestemming Erfgoed: in gesprek met de plek," a [conference](#) held in late 2023, was already a collaboration between CYM, Flanders Heritage Agency and VISITFLANDERS to bring the heritage and tourism sectors together.



- The primary mission of VISITFLANDERS is to position Flanders internationally, with a view to a flourishing Flanders. It is striking that not everyone within the cultural sector seems to be equally committed to this objective, which is perceived as discouraging. In the shifts between generations within the cultural sector, VISITFLANDERS sees a more open perspective, but there seems to be a lack of a shared basic motivation, such as the pursuit of a thriving community of which tourism is an integral part.
- VISITFLANDERS indicates that after years of searching for approaches and strategies, there is limited willingness to share data on cultural events through a shared Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. There is a lack of enthusiasm and resources to organise this collaboration.
- As an alternative approach to systematic planning and consultation, VISITFLANDERS believes in setting up test cases from simple principles, such as valorising existing initiatives: observing what is happening, and then consulting with those who are able and willing to set out shared goals. For example, this approach could be initiated by Event Flanders.

4.4.3.3 Collaboration with other policy areas (3): FIT.

What does the policy framework say?

- ▶ "Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT) raises awareness for and helps Flemish companies in export and internationalisation on the one hand and persuades and guides foreign companies to invest (additionally) in Flanders on the other hand. The goal is economic and focused on creating prosperity. Flanders Investment & Trade does not have any specific culture-related mission. The importance of supporting culture is purely economic. The resources of FIT are limited, so their focus is on economically promising sectors.
- ▶ There are various forms of support. FIT offers standard information on foreign markets and international business, such as country files, market studies, trade proposals, etc. On the other hand, they also answer specific questions. They also provide advice to companies looking to go international and to potential investors (with information & e.g. visits to business sites) who are considering investing in Flanders. Furthermore, FIT also organises activities with the same purpose: group business trips and trade show attendance, seminars, meeting days, etc.). Finally, FIT also supports businesses financially with a grant.
- ▶ Companies (with company number) from the creative/cultural sectors can take advantage of this support just like any other company. As regards subsidies, there are agreements with other subsidising bodies within the cultural field and companies from this sector are sometimes referred through. Given its limited resources, FIT indicates that in the future it will focus more "on companies where our services can make the biggest difference in terms of our mission of creating prosperity. This process will be rolled out next year."
- ▶ In summary: Flanders Investment & Trade does not have any specific culture-related mission. The importance of supporting culture is purely economic.
- ▶ "Within the creative sectors, entertainment in particular is a focus sector for FIT. We specifically target this through actions on the programme, market studies, etc. Gamescom, for example, or the collaboration between Entertainment.LAB and the Entertainment Hub in Boom (Tomorrowland). The actions developed around a focus sector are the result of consultations between the head office and diplomatic representations in which the Flemish potential is tested against foreign markets and promotional opportunities.
- ▶ FIT has no policy impact other than the potential economic contribution of its action programme and other forms of support. We aim to provide opportunities for Flemish game developers and entertainment companies to sell their products and services internationally, establish partnerships and attract foreign



companies that can come and further strengthen the sector in Flanders. With a view to creating wealth and jobs in Flanders." (Source: input FIT, mail 31/10/2023)

- ▶ Together with interest group FLEGA, FIT is responsible for the international action plan within Flemish gaming policy.
- ▶ FIT offers financial support for companies to attend trade shows. Flemish companies, including cultural and creative companies, can apply for financial support for initiatives in foreign countries: prospecting trips, fairs and niche events, digital promotional material, setting up prospecting offices, custom international projects, etc. In the case of design and fashion, this appears to be mainly for participation in trade shows. "At FIT, designers can apply for grants to participate in foreign trade shows, although these are awarded on commercial grounds." ([Field Drawing Design](#))

What gaps are perceived in this area?

- ▶ **The purely economic approach of FIT sometimes clashes with other arguments such as cultural added value or diplomatic intentions or interests. FIT's procedures are also not aligned with economic realities and the nature of market forces in the cultural and creative sectors**

This barrier is highlighted by both FIT and respondents in the sector. FIT states that it will focus even more on sectors that create wealth and jobs. From FIT's perspective, a win-win with the ICP does not appear to be an explicit objective, rather an interesting side effect.

- "All companies with a company number can solicit FIT's services, under the same conditions. Currently. In the future, FIT wants to use its limited resources where it can make the most difference with a view to its objective: creating prosperity in Flanders. The ICP has other objectives and FIT therefore fits less well into this framework.
- Initiatives sometimes run concurrently, and collaboration can almost occasionally be mutually reinforcing. Or the approach or action programmes of partners in the consultation offers opportunities for FIT in terms of their own objectives.
- A consultation structure is envisaged with the Departments CYM, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office and VISITFLANDERS in which cooperation opportunities are tested on the basis of projects and action programmes. Given the different remits, this is often more a case of activities running concurrently rather than an actual content-related joining of forces" (Input FIT, mail 31/10/2023)

The Field Drawing shows that economic considerations are crucial as a prerequisite for realising projects and for career and organisational development. An approach that starts from a commercial rationale is unlikely to be able to respond to market forces in most sectors, with the exception of games and (partly) design. In many sectors, FIT is not on the radar from a commercial rationale. Reference is also made to the fact that cultural productions can in many cases be considered unique 'prototypes', the economic returns of which are not immediately guaranteed, and which above all require a tailored strategic approach: targeting specific circuits and markets, etc.

- ▶ **Flanders Investment & Trade has significant need for information about and knowledge of the sectors it promotes. It partly sources this information itself or and can rely on partners.**



5 / Points for improvement

5.1. Basic principles

We now put forward suggestions for points for improvement for a future International Cultural Policy, following the same structure as in Chapter 4. Building on the gaps identified there, we discuss possible avenues for the basic principles of (new) foundations for a future international cultural policy (5.1), recommendations regarding the follow-the actor driven approach of the ICP (5.2), the process of strategic vision development and implementation within the future ICP (5.3), and the complementary collaboration between government bodies and intermediary actors (§5.4). The question is how current gaps and points for improvement can be tackled in a future International Cultural Policy.

The structure in this Chapter is based on the gaps identified in Chapter 4. This provides basic material, which is compiled in the summarising Chapter 2 and thought-through from a consistent, forward-looking approach. We therefore refer readers looking for the recommendations of the Field Drawing of International Cultural Policy from Flanders to Chapter 2. Our rationale is provided in Chapters 4 and 5, as well as further details regarding the operationalisation and further elaboration of a number of strands.

5.1.1 The sectoral scope of the international cultural policy

- ▶ **Develop a consistent approach to overarching and sector-specific strategies regarding International Cultural Policy.**

A new Strategic Framework for ICP starts from a consistent culture-wide policy vision of the value and meaning of internationalisation for the broad field of culture, including consideration for how this added value is realised within the various subsectors (arts, cultural heritage and the socio-cultural sectors), taking into account sector-specific characteristics and needs -and at the same time applying to subsectors-, processes, strengths and points for improvement.

A clearer and more transparent interplay between the sector-specific and overarching visions and strategies regarding international cultural policy needs to be conveyed in this regard. In some - but not all - sectors, broader sectoral policies are being developed with the international dimension in mind. Within the sector-specific policy frameworks, it is made clear how this vision is translated into a sector-specific toolkit, which on the one hand connects to the processes/uses within different subsectors and on the other hand also takes into account the management aspects (follow-up by the DCYM and the funds).

The current procedures for arts and cultural heritage, especially intangible heritage, offer a starting point to make this way of working systematic, and roll it out more broadly across the various subsectors. A Landscape drawing or policy preparation analysis feeds a Strategic Vision Paper, which then helps guide policy options.

- ▶ **Develop consistent support for the various subsectors by the system of intermediary organisations.**

A consistent approach is needed as regards support from the sectoral institutes and funds supporting internationalisation in the various subsectors. Currently, there are gaps and fragmentation as regards the sectoral support in the area of funding, practice support, practice development, networking and public perception in the different subsectors. Not only the remits, but also the budgetary possibilities vary from sector to sector.



We refer to the current spending review relating to the system of intermediaries in the culture field, which identifies overlaps and gaps for support in internationalisation and makes recommendations regarding a more consistent approach. This study will be presented in the spring of 2024.

► **Envisage adequate capacity (people and resources) for complementary, overarching, complementary international cultural policies.**

A strong and adequately staffed DCYM is necessary to play a proactive guiding role in International Cultural Policy: for implementing the ICP, policy development, coordination and regular exchanges with all stakeholders (actors in the field, intermediary organisations, government bodies), participation in relevant international policy networks for policy development and knowledge sharing, etc.

In addition to the sector-specific toolkit, sufficient operating funds are needed to provide specific incentives for a more integrally developed and concretely implemented international cultural policy, also as a lever for cooperation with sectors and other policy areas.

Provide adequate capacity to manage the sector-specific toolkit. Good coordination of this toolkit (project-based grant toolkit) and the supporting effect (public perception, network development, professionalism) by the intermediary organisations is important. The funds are in control of this themselves, for the other sectors there is a need for a short line and good coordination between DCYM and the sectoral support centres. Both sectors and administrators (funds, DCYM) benefit from simple and easily accessible procedures, with minimal planning burden.

Within the DCYM, good internal coordination between teams/staff with sectoral assignments (and Media) and the International Policy Team is necessary. Coordination regarding the importance of the ICP as a policy objective (sectoral, overarching, Culture and Media) is necessary.

Foreign delegations in other policy areas (in particular Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office) also need more capacity to seize on opportunities in the context of the ICP (by focusing on network development, joint projects, etc.).

► **Incentives for technological and social innovation, based on cross-sector collaboration.**

In a rapidly changing societal context, there is a need within the ICP for specific incentives for innovation, both technological and social/societal. Complex issues require an interdisciplinary approach. Policy can respond to this by envisaging specific incentives for technological innovation in which actors from the broad field of culture form partnerships with actors from other policy areas. For various reasons - the Flemish cultural sector not wanting to miss the boat, or on the contrary, wanting to take a pioneering role internationally - there are opportunities for an incentive policy with an eye on technological and social innovation. The will is there, but there is a lack of a clear policy framework with consideration for joint added value and complementarity both within the DCYM policy fields and with other departments and domains (including vision, and incentives for funding, network development and knowledge building). This is a theme that can be addressed in the ICP, but which obviously does not have to be approached exclusively from within the ICP. It could be a significant added value if it responds to the needs highlighted above.

Incentives for technological innovation are linked to the needs within music, games, film, etc.. whereby reference is made to exemplary initiatives in Wallonia and the Netherlands. In these sectors, technological developments are currently causing significant disruption, but at the same time there are opportunities - where cross-sector clusters can provide the opportunity to explore these possibilities. [See e.g. Wallifornia \(walliforniamusictech.com\)](https://www.walliforniamusictech.com).



an entertainment & technology hub based in Liège. Start-ups, professionals and investors work together here to build the future of their industries. Making connections on the global scale is essential in this regard. The main sectors are music, sports, e-sports and gaming, with three core pillars: investing (start-ups), experimentation and entrepreneurship (accelerators and test environments) and connecting (organising meetings in Belgium and around the world). There are opportunities in connecting current Flemish policy initiatives - the innovative partner projects, Flanders Technology and Innovation, the current policy around Digital Transformation, including the remits for meemoo, Publiq and Cultuurconnect – the supporting centres responsible for different aspects of the digital transformation of the culture sectors - to the trends and needs in this Field Drawing.

Incentives for social and societal innovation - based on transition thinking, design thinking, etc. - connect with needs highlighted by design, architecture, socio-cultural work,... but also arts and cultural heritage. In all these sectors, there are opportunities to collaborate with actors from other social domains from the expertise and methodologies developed there, to focus on social and societal innovation. This is relevant to the ICP because the issues it seeks to address transcend national borders and it is important to be able to share expertise and lessons learned internationally¹⁷.

5.1.2 Flanders in Europe

- ▶ **Continue to invest in European policy advocacy for policy topics that impact cultural practices. Continue to focus on referrals to European policy frameworks.**

This study underlines the fact that European policy frameworks have an impact - directly and indirectly - on developments within the subsectors. It is therefore important for the Flemish Community to continue having an impact in this regard, both at the EU, UNESCO and the Flemish and federal political and policy levels. This is a mission for the DCYM. The impact of European regulations is sometimes (sub)sector specific, so it is advisable to coordinate on this and gather input from intermediary organisations and interest groups.

5.1.3 At home and abroad

- ▶ **Consider the different dimensions of working internationally, both inside and outside Flanders: recognise Flanders and Brussels as an international mental space and account for interdependence in transnational and global value networks.**

The Strategic Framework emphasises Flanders' international presence. And that remains important. Also recognise that Flanders and Brussels are - physically and mentally - an inherently international space. Working internationally is not only about movements from inside to outside and vice versa, but also about recognising the interdependence of local communities and transnational networks and value chains - both within culture and more broadly. Within the policy vision of the international cultural policy, a reassessment is needed that takes into account (a) the fact that many cultural processes take place within transnational contexts, networks and value frameworks and (b) the international, superdiverse and multilingual reality of cultural and social life in Flanders and Brussels.

This consideration calls for a renewed positioning of the Flemish International Cultural Policy. The question here is how the ICP relates to the changing way 'the international' manifests itself 'in Belgium': including in the

¹⁷ For inspiration: cross-border collaboration in [Geopark Scheldt Delta](#) and the many [interreg collaborations](#) on tangible and intangible heritage, and for inspiration here: https://immaterieelerfgoed.be/files/attachments/1833/JorijnNeyrinck_InterviewSocius.pdf and <https://www.ichandmuseums.eu/en>



presence of international artists and cultural workers, the presence of an international audience. These questions are relevant to both ICP and broader cultural policy.

- ▶ **A context-specific or demand-oriented approach with more consideration for the demand side in the International Cultural Policy: what does the outside world need, what special things does Flanders have to offer in this area?**

Besides the question of which actors, goods and practices Flanders wants to 'export', the future international cultural policy can also start from what the outside world (international/foreign (potential) partners, cities, regions, countries, continents) is asking for or needs, and what Flanders can offer in that area. This is important from artistic, social and economic rationales. What does working internationally contribute to local artistic and cultural scenes and ecosystems? What does it contribute to local communities? Where is there a market for what? The field knowledge of diplomatic representations, FIT and VISITFLANDERS and sectoral intermediary players is important in this regard to look for answers, and develop a focused strategic approach with impact on the field.

5.1.4 Flanders' reach

- ▶ **Explore new opportunities for Flanders' international branding abroad: Flanders as a region that focuses on innovation, sustainability and liveability.**

Flanders can differentiate itself internationally as a region where expertise is available to focus on liveability via cultural practices, innovation and social change, as is already happening in the areas of socio-cultural work, amateur arts, (serious) games and also increasingly in other subsectors. Collaboration with other fields, such as urban development, healthcare and social work can also gain further visibility in international operations.¹⁸

Currently, the focus of international cultural policy is on creators, products and oeuvres, leaving cross-cutting cultural and social themes underexposed. It is important to address this gap, as current policies are missing opportunities to put Flemish culture on the global map. Especially within the domains of architecture, design and socio-cultural work, this need is emphasized by the relevant actors in the field, but there are also relevant perspectives within arts and heritage. For example, the way of working in the field of intangible heritage in Flanders (with the network of regional points and volunteers) generates a lot of curiosity abroad, and is therefore also an 'export product'. The Dutch cultural education policy and approach attracts a lot of international attention and is a similar thematic export.

Particularly in the international context of architecture and design, there is a notable shift toward a more societal approach, with an emphasis on culture as a catalyst for a more sustainable society. There are concrete opportunities for the ICP here, as Flemish architects and designers are internationally recognised for their expertise in this field. The Flemish ICP can take advantage of these opportunities by actively promoting culture from Flanders as a driver of sustainability and liveability, and Flanders as a region where sustainability and liveability are also addressed from cultural and creative sectors.

¹⁸ For example, "Turkish migration to Ghent is now 60 years old. One in ten people in Ghent have Turkish roots. But where is the heritage? What do we need to preserve for future generations of Ghent natives? Who better to decide than the next generation itself." In this process, young people from Turkish organisations go in search of objects, but also stories, meanings and places that are important. They do this with older generations in their families, but also their neighbours, acquaintances, museums & archives. (Heritage Cell Ghent, STAM, Burgerplicht non-profit association and a network of associations)



- ▶ **Pragmatic partnerships with privileged partners, where a profiling as the Flemish Community and from the Flemish Community can pragmatically track within sector-specific contexts with cooperation with privileged partners abroad (French and German-speaking Community, the Netherlands).**

A pragmatic approach is the best way to reconcile the different objectives in the ICP - strengthening the presence and networking of actors, goods and practices as well as putting Flanders on the international map. In the process, intermediary actors can develop targeted partnerships to strengthen the international position of Flemish actors and Brussels, together with their counterparts in the other communities, the Netherlands or possibly other countries/regions. This can expressly include collaborations with a view to concrete projects or processes, and obviously also specific knowledge and expertise exchange, for example.

5.1.5 Approaching cross-sector and cross-policy themes through the ICP

- ▶ **Recognise the importance of major international themes: digital transformation, diversity, sustainability, fair practice.**

Continue to focus on digital transformation in an international framework, and strengthen the link with the ICP. Intense discussions are currently taking place at international forums on issues such as environmental sustainability, diversity, inclusion, decolonisation, and digitalisation. The fact that digitisation is currently a key Flemish focal point is useful, and offers excellent opportunities. Through its EU Council Presidency in 2024, Flanders is taking a European leadership role in this area. However, other opportunities probably also remain untapped: focusing on digital breakthroughs offers opportunities to strengthen Flemish actors internationally (see 5.1.1).

The Strategic Framework for ICP and sector-specific policy visions appear to be cautious on the other points and may consider discussions on environmental sustainability, diversity and inclusiveness as less relevant to Flemish (international) cultural policy. It is crucial for Flanders to actively participate in these international dialogues. This applies to various themes, including environmental sustainability, fairness, diversity, inclusive work, decolonisation, etc. It is important for Flanders (policy, intermediary organisations, sectors) to play an active role in these discussions in order to be part of the broader international community.

5.2. 'Follow the actor' in the future ICP

5.2.1 Artistic and content development

- ▶ **Consider 'growth paths' in the sector-specific toolkit.**

Sustainable internationalisation means having consideration for coaching, guidance, network development, etc. of actors with still modestly developed international networks and expertise. As previously mentioned, not all sectors have a sectoral centre of expertise with this remit. On the one hand, this is a point of attention for the cultural intermediary organisations (sectoral support centres and funds, in addition to Culture Counter) which, from their core tasks, focus on practice support and network development).

Another important fact is cooperation between actors active in Flanders with already developed expertise and networks, to share it with other organisations, with emerging (or otherwise) talent and less internationally



networked players, to share knowledge, expertise and networks. Examples include studios, workshops, producers, managers, performance venues that supervise emerging talent and make it visible. They can do this most effectively if they can work with a long-term perspective, not with a fragmented and project-based approach. On the other hand, it is also a focus point for multi-year grant rounds: it is part of 'landscape care' to ensure that there are enough sectoral players who can guide emerging talents in their first international steps and network development. (See below: [Kritische Succesfactoren van de Vlaamse Kunsten - Cases uit de muziek-, dans- en theatersector](#), a study by Bart Van Looy and Ward Van de Velde (KULeuven) on direct and indirect government support for growth paths within music and the performing arts).

- ▶ **Together with the subsectors, investigate the strengths and uniqueness of the Flemish ecosystems and also contrast them with foreign observations, and then decide on a common level of ambition and make choices.**

The Flemish ICP must determine how and with what ambition actors position themselves in cultural ecosystems and 'value chains' or 'value networks' (an economic perspective of cultural ecosystems), which are by definition transnational and within which there are institutions and forums that are important for reputation building.

On the one hand, we hear calls for 'scaling up': focus on more large-scale and visible events in order to occupy a more distinctive position in these transnational ecosystems and value chains, and be involved with clout at a more large-scale institutional level (e.g., high-profile museums worldwide).

On the other hand, there are calls for an approach that starts from making visible and strengthening a range of small and medium-sized initiatives, actors, networks and processes - some of which can be highly 'niche' but therefore distinctive at the international level. A clustering and connection of such small-scale initiatives can be equally impactful, and possibly more distinctive and appropriate for Flanders as a 'semi-peripheral' region, as expressed e.g. in relation to the visual arts ('Landscape Sketch for the Arts, [Landschapstekening Kunsten 2019 | Kunstenpunt](#)).

5.2.2 Individual questions

- ▶ **Include fair practice and fair collaboration as an objective and focus of future international cultural policy.**

Encourage preconditions regarding fair practice. Working internationally can only empower people when certain preconditions are met, e.g., fair pay and fair practice, clear working statutes, etc. Principles of fair practice must be applied in the sector-specific toolkit, which must include the necessary incentives that artists and cultural workers are paid fairly and can work in transparent and safe conditions. The overarching Strategic Framework can stress the importance of this.

It is also a question of applying principles of fair cooperation also in the activities and processes covered by the ICP. This means applying principles of fairness, equity and transparency in the collaborations with actors who are not active in Flanders or Brussels. More and more government initiatives (funds, arts councils, ministries, national institutes) are taking responsibility in this area at the international level. This recommendation calls for the Flemish cultural policy to support fair collaboration in cultural relations worldwide, in line with the concerns raised in the context of EUNIC, see [Fair Collaboration in Cultural Relations \(eunicglobal.eu\)](#)

- ▶ **Envisage within the sector-specific toolkit (in all sectors) the need for sufficient capacity (and tools) for professionalism, entrepreneurship and sustainable network development.**



Invest in professionalism, know-how and the possibility for networking among the actors so that they can also independently follow up and valorise the opportunities that arise is important. This means, among other things:

- Sufficient operating resources for organisations to focus on network development and international knowledge sharing (operating resources and personnel costs), to enable them to seize international opportunities on their own and capitalise on the existing offering for professionalism.
- Continue to focus on practice support and practice development through intermediary organisations in all sectors, in addition to the Culture Counter. Practice development also means: support in the development of an international strategy as part of the global policy of organisations and companies, both profit and non-profit. Envision a clear mission for practice support and practice development in all cultural subsectors, with or without a sectoral centre of expertise. Culture Counter plays a supporting role for commercial and legal issues, including internationalisation.
- Cooperation with the education sector All sectors need a qualitative formal training offering that emphasizes the commitment to developing appropriate profiles and competencies.

► **Include supervisory roles in the sector-specific toolkit if they play an essential mediating role in internationalisation.**

Translators, curators, management, etc. are crucial links in the internationalisation of cultural actors, goods and practices - and therefore also in policy strategy and the sector-specific toolkit (they also need access to funding, knowledge building, and networking).

► **Referrals to EU instruments and funding.**

It is important to strengthen Flemish cultural actors in the framework of EU programmes. This can take the form of referrals to relevant European grant frameworks and programmes, providing content-related support and capacity (resources, support in drafting applications, etc.) or funding to participate in project calls based on cooperation between relevant actors (Creative Europe Desks, intermediary organisations, etc.). Funding can be either pre-investment or the Flemish contribution in matching funding for collaborations that require this. A basic condition for this is sufficient support among cultural organisations to take advantage of these opportunities.

Cooperation between leaders in Flanders: the sectoral institutes and funds, Creative Europe Desks, Liaison agency Flanders-Europe remains important. Based on a shared vision, together they can be a learning network to raise awareness in the sector about the added value of working internationally. See [Onderzoeksopdracht met aanbevelingen om betere informatie over en toeleiding naar EU-programma's voor de brede Vlaamse culturele sector te realiseren | Vlaanderen.be](#).

Cooperation between intermediary players in different countries. In addition to EU instruments (including Interreg and other non-cultural programmes), there are also opportunities to further develop international cooperation with other European funds and intermediary organisations, on themes that are relevant and enriching for these funds and intermediaries. The cooperation between Flanders Literature and the Dutch Literature Fund is one form of this collaboration, but many other forms are conceivable, through matching funds, for example. These can be further explored and tested in consultation with the sector - including the Brakke Grond and deBuren - and intermediary actors. For example, the German federal Fonds Soziokultur worked together with the Dutch Fund for Culture participation for nearly 10 years in a joint funding and calling programme "[Jonge Kunst](#)". For some time now, the Fonds Soziokultur has been working with arts councils in the



UK in "[Cultural Bridge](#)," which focuses on social engagement, participation, exchange and learning from each other.

5.2.3 Economic capital

- ▶ **Embed support for performance-oriented activities within a broader approach aimed at capacity building and professionalism.**

In an increasingly competitive international cultural field, there is a growing demand for expanding and strengthening support for performance-oriented activities abroad, especially within the live arts (support for concerts, performances and tours), in addition to exhibitions and other performance-oriented activities. Various actors call for a larger budget to strengthen the competitiveness of Flemish actors in the international arena. It is important that this kind of support is embedded in a broader framework, where opportunities are collectively created and actors on the ground are also strengthened in terms of professionalism and have sufficient capacity to follow up on the opportunities which arise.

- ▶ **Focus on collective promotion and visibility of various subsectors and niches in an innovative way**

Searching for support for performing abroad in international cultural policy goes hand in hand with the need for collective visibility for various subsectors. To increase this visibility, it is crucial for Flemish actors to be actively present at important sectoral hotspots, such as biennials, showcases and fairs (focusing on different subsectors and niches within the subsectors). Joint international communication is also important. Cultural intermediary players, as well as sector players and the various government bodies, can play complementary roles here.

Strategic partnerships play a vital role in the success of these initiatives, and intermediary organisations must be able to collaborate with domestic and foreign partners (French-speaking Belgium, the Netherlands) to pool capacity, resources, networks and expertise. This increases the impact of promotional activities.

There is a need for innovative approaches in this area, and in many cases this needs further exploration and testing. The tried and tested formulas are under pressure. There is a need for experimentation with regard to new approaches, such as focusing on niches or specific focus areas, in which Flanders is distinctive and for which there is a demand abroad or in an international context - or focusing on long-term, local anchoring and embedding (e.g. visitor programmes with field trips, studio visits, meetings, etc. in the city, in addition to networking opportunities).

Taking advantage of already well established cooperation(s) between institutions and initiatives in Flanders (intermediary actors, actors in the field, government bodies, profit and non-profit, etc.) can be an asset to create more capacity together and go off the beaten path in an innovative way, in cooperation with foreign institutions.

- ▶ **Encourage the development of new organisational and business models that respond to technological developments.**

Through an integrated approach that combines financial support, training, cross-sectoral cooperation and legal support, the policy can create a favorable environment for the development of new organisational and business models that capitalise on new opportunities and possibilities in an international context, especially in light of the profound technological developments in the cultural sectors. For example, AI will boom in next 3-5 years and irrevocably make its mark and impact on the cultural sector in all its facets and international working. AI has



implications for the profession and international field of translators, photographers, writers, editors, music producers, musicians, archivists, audiovisual producers, game developers, designers, architects, etc. In this regard, it is important not to bury heads in the sand and support the industry with resources, expertise and training to respond in good time and preferably stay ahead. Mutatis mutandis, a similar line of argument can be developed for other technological developments, such as immersive technology and AR/VR/XR in relation to live performance (music, performing arts) and visiting exhibitions, the development of game engines and their use outside the games sector (e.g. films, media arts, audiovisual production, immersive environments, etc.). Here too, proactive incentives are needed to keep up with or, rather, stay ahead of international competition.

5.2.4 Social and networking-related

- ▶ **International network development must remain an important component of a future international cultural policy, both within the sector-specific toolkit and in complementary international cultural policies.**

Renewal of networks: within the sector-specific toolkit, there must be sufficient instruments to enable a variety of actors (artists, producers, development-oriented places such as workshops and residencies, performance venues, support work such as management offices, and also outside the established and known us-versus-them circuits, etc.) to explore new connections and develop sustainable international networks. To also give individual actors and organisations without developed networks the opportunity to develop (internationally), it is important that knowledge and networks can also be shared more broadly within cultural ecosystems. The cultural intermediary players (centres of expertise, funds, sector institutions) but also cultural institutions themselves can play an important role in stimulating this collective knowledge sharing, as is already happening today, preferably together and in complementarity with the field knowledge of the diplomatic representations.

The complementary cooperation between DCYM, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, FIT and VISITFLANDERS are assets to strengthen and perpetuate the sustainable international networking of the cultural ecosystems: the network development and possible project support by the diplomatic representations of Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, and foreign offices of FIT and VISITFLANDERS, the support of the presence of cultural actors at foreign fairs by FIT, the support of international networking events in Flanders by VISITFLANDERS/Event Flanders, and where possible also longer lines of cooperation to be jointly set out in the future. For a possible concrete approach, we refer to the strategic pathway as outlined in 5.3.1.

Diversity and inclusion as key themes in ICP: Diversity and inclusion are important current themes in cultural practice and policy in Flanders and abroad, on different strands: gender equality, people with disabilities, ethnic-cultural diversity. These are themes that transcend the scope of the ICP. Of particular interest within the ICP is the debate on decolonisation and restitution, which involves collections, archives or stories in relation to the former colonies or creators and audiences with a migration background living and working in Flanders, with whom stories and intangible heritage continues to change.... This is an important issue at international forums, and it is important for credibility that Flanders also takes a position here. The [recent opinion of the Dutch UNESCO Commission](#) once again emphatically shows that not only are opportunities being missed, but also that the future of current cultural structures is coming under increasing pressure. Due in part to a lack of representation within traditional cultural institutions, programmes and funds, young people with diverse cultural origins are not adequately reached as creators and audiences (and this also poses a danger to the future of these institutions) and just as importantly, a great potential of qualities and talent remains untapped. This situation is not much different for Flanders. And these observations (also) have implications for the international operations of Flemish actors in Flanders and abroad, and this also calls for a re-examination of the Flemish ICP. Heritage, especially



when there is a shared history, contributes to mutual understanding¹⁹. In the Netherlands, for example, in 2023 and 2024, there was a lot of focus on the history of slavery and the celebration of its abolition. This is now being addressed in numerous international regulations and calls, see e.g. <https://cultuurparticipatie.nl/subsidie-aanvragen/79/erfgoed-herdenkingsjaar-slavernijverleden>.

To make the ICP more inclusive in the future, in line with the overall Cultural Policy, and to ensure equal access regardless of gender, colour, disability, socio-economic background and the intersection between these parameters, different strategies and policies can be considered:

- Referral and accessibility. Accessible procedures and broad communication, awareness-raising and learning pathways, support for projects that focus on equal opportunities, diversity, solidarity and sharing, active engagement in European frameworks that focus on inclusive work (such as Europe Beyond Access, Keychange, etc.), involving diverse perspectives (including diverse juries) in selection procedures for schemes/support related to the International Cultural Policy, etc.
 - Broadening networks. Openness/transparency is also necessary to other, new platforms, circuits and partnerships that are less obvious, both inside and outside the cultural sector: making the known networks more accessible to people who do not yet know their way around and also allowing 'new' voices to be heard, as well as discovering and engaging new networks.
 - Knowledge sharing. In addition, Flemish actors in the field of inclusive work can learn and exchange a lot with both Flemish organisations from other (subsectors) and international partners and practices, where more/long experience and expertise has already been gathered in this field, e.g. in the UK but also in Brussels, across the language border or not.
- **In order to develop networks sustainably, it is important to focus not only on international *projects* (e.g. presence at fairs, showcases and festivals or the support of products and productions (including translations), but also on *pathways* (which enable those involved to also valorise the opportunities that arise).**

In supporting international projects at home/ abroad, it is important to also envisage sufficient time and space for meaningful exchange with local cultural ecosystems. E.g. For an author visiting Flanders/Brussels for a book launch, also arrange for conversations with peers, etc. For performance abroad, also provide time/space for meaningful exchange with local artistic scenes and local communities E.g. through international mentorship programmes, job shadowing, internships, etc. This requires a more process-oriented approach, where, in addition to project funding (with consideration for activities aimed at local anchoring, promotion, debate and exchange), efforts are also made to provide support for creators, or long-term collaboration with partners at home or abroad, etc.

5.2.5 Economic capital

Within the future ICP, environmental sustainability can be encouraged by:

- Raising awareness and vision development, and leading by example.

¹⁹ For an example from the UNESCO report cited: DAR Cultural Agency, see <https://dar.nu/> (working in Rotterdam and internationally) DAR is a cultural agency and platform that represents talented artists and initiates cultural programmes, talks and exhibitions that go beyond the Eurocentric perspective. The focus is on meaningful collaborations between artists from the design, architecture and visual arts fields, brands, museums and communities. Strong combinations of artistic development and business independence are the starting point.



- ⊖ Encourage awareness and vision development within various sectors about sustainable internationalisation, in line with UN initiatives such as Playing for the Planet. Increase understanding of environmental sustainability and the impact of internationalisation on the environment.
 - Introduce incentive and coercive incentives to promote environmental sustainability in the sector-specific toolkit. Encourage ecological thinking by providing funding opportunities that allow for environmental sustainability. Take inspiration from the top-ups within Culture Moves Europe, where environmentally sustainable travel is positively rewarded with the resources needed to implement slow travel.
 - Actors in the field, government bodies and intermediary players can lead by example themselves, applying sustainability principles in their own practices and communicating and testifying about them.
- Tools, coaching and networking to reduce carbon emissions. Facilitate the implementation of environmental sustainability in the cultural sector by providing tools and coaching. There is a role for centres of expertise and funds to support sector players with tools such as the eco-calculators, sustainability guide and networking within networks, such as PULSE, to share knowledge and promote practice development.
 - Room for innovation and experimentation. Create space for innovation and experimentation in the field of sustainable internationalisation. Encourage R&D pathways.

5.3. Strategic vision development:

5.3.1 General

- ▶ In the future, a process of strategy development and implementation is needed that is robust enough to guide the actions of the actors involved (intermediary organisations and government agencies) from a long-term perspective while being flexible enough to respond to rapidly changing environmental factors.

The building blocks for this strategy would ideally include:

- An environmental and field analysis of cultural ecosystems in their changing social context (cf. developments in previous chapters) as a starting point
- Informed in part by political considerations, determine policy options, objectives and priorities in consultation with various stakeholders
- This can be based on a mission, explicit value framework and a clear and concrete vision of the future that takes into account the potential value and significance of working internationally for the cultural ecosystems in their social context, both in Flanders and beyond, and answering the question: where does Flanders want to be internationally in 5-7 years?
 - The world is big. Vision development takes into account not only what Flanders is good at or wants to excel at, but also what this specifically contributes to what is desired elsewhere and the fact of our mutual dependence in a transnational, global (cultural) ecology. This involves both concrete productions, products and collaborations, as well as expertise and thematic exchanges in Flanders and in/with foreign countries. For a relevant practical example of a demand-driven approach, see the Action Plan for Cultural Cooperation with [South Africa](#).



- Creating support among stakeholders (intermediary organisations and government bodies) may also be by involving them early in this process of vision development and strategy forming, and through them also consulting stakeholders within the sectors.
- Some of this vision development may be sector-specific, but it is also from a consistent approach and framework across cultural subsectors. For this reason, it is also good to involve the various foreign delegations (diplomatic representations, VISITFLANDERS, FIT) - from the field knowledge present within the foreign delegations and together to see what opportunities are in their context for which actors and sectors. It is important in this regard that the foreign delegations are also adequately up-to-date with developments on the ground, that they have sufficient capacity and the right profiles available to focus more on this.
- Cities can also be involved, as they are often main shareholders within cultural organisations that engage in international activities (museums, for example) and sometimes engage in explicit international cultural policies themselves. Since many cities in Belgium are candidates to become European Capital of Culture 2030 (from a competitive point of view), this coordination is particularly relevant right now. Moreover, the international dimension is not only an issue in large cities, and for this reason it may be interesting to further explore the international dimension of supra-local ecosystems, based on the remit of OP/TIL as a focal point for supra-local cultural action. This is in the pipeline.
- Translate strategic framework into concrete lines of action. This includes:
 - Looking at how the sector-specific toolkit contributes (or doesn't) to tapping this potential (evaluation and monitoring) and provide the necessary resources.
 - Where necessary, adjusting the toolkit or complement it with specific additional incentives (sector-specific, culture-wide or cross-sectoral/cross-policy domain).
 - Providing sufficient operating resources and staff capacity for guidance and implementation.
- Coordination and alignment between intermediary actors and government bodies. Clear agreements with all actors to contribute to the vision (to be developed) from their core tasks, provided with sufficient resources to be able to realise these core tasks in a quality manner.
- Need for a long-term political perspective. There is a lack of continuity of funding when Minister's offices are replaced, when large projects are rolled out. A more involved follow-up of the international cultural policy within the Flemish Parliament is desirable, from a long-term perspective.

5.3.2 Focus areas

- ▶ **This study is the impetus to make future strategic choices less geographically based, but rather to take a thematic approach. Opportunities can likely still be looked at within specific geographical contexts, from bilateral cooperation, the presence of diplomatic representations, and specific situations (such as the context of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve).**

A more focused and intricate process is needed to identify opportunities that are meaningful and add value to actors, sectors and society. This is a process of differentiation and requires a tailored approach.

Compare: Dutch diplomatic representations in priority countries (e.g., Berlin, New York, London, Paris, Indonesia, Paramaribo) are expected to draw up multi-year priority plans for their regions. The question is to actively investigate where the Dutch offering can stand out in that region and (more importantly) for which demand, a



potential audience and/or cooperation partners can be found. This will be coordinated with ministries, funds and Dutch Culture. These can therefore be highly specific niches (such as contemporary, composed jazz), as well as certain subsectors of creative industry, a specific strong museum collection elsewhere in the world around which an exhibition or series is being prepared (both classical and contemporary partly depending on the demand), or arts or common cultural heritage (forts, archives, slavery past, etc.), but also thematically, for example around cultural education, knowledge transfer around conservation, collaboration between water management and the arts, or urban development and community arts.

- ▶ **The objective of putting cultural goods, actors and practices from Flanders on the international map can be strengthened from a collaboration with privileged partners, including the French and German-speaking communities and the Netherlands. These are not only priority focus areas, but also strategic partners in a trans- and multinational context.**

Continue to pursue cooperation agreements with the French and German Communities and with the Netherlands to encourage mutual exchange and cooperation.

Continue to work with other communities in Belgium to have a joint impact on European policies.

- In terms of policy, there can be more consideration for pragmatic strategic partnerships with French-speaking Belgium and/or the Netherlands from the intermediary organisations, regarding collective promotion and network development, building on the existing close collaborations between intermediaries and agencies from Flanders, Wallonia (and Brussels Capital Region), such as Belgium is Design, Belgium Booms. These could have a place in a new Strategic Framework for International Cultural Policy.
- Cooperation with the Netherlands is particularly important for language-related sectors: literature, theatre, intangible heritage, etc. Many actors are active in the field of exchange between Flanders and the Netherlands, and their knowledge and expertise can be utilised even more effectively:
- Centres of expertise and funds in Flanders and their partners/counterparts in the Netherlands (Literary Fund, Performing Arts Fund (formerly Dutch Performing Arts), Dutch Music Export, etc.);

Bilateral Flemish-Dutch initiatives (de Brakke Grond, deBuren, Taalunie - Union for the Dutch Language, Ons Erfdeel/The Low Countries, etc. and their important role as links/connectors between ecosystems in Flanders and the Netherlands);

Through the sector-specific toolkit. There are numerous interregional/cross-border initiatives within the various subsectors. For example, heritage (knowledge centres such as KIEN) and exchanges in which language plays a role (or in which Dutch is also the go-to working language). See also the cultural heritage project grants that are often Flemish-Dutch collaborations.

5.3.3 Knowledge-based policy development: a learning environment for the ICP

- ▶ **Invest in monitoring and knowledge building regarding the international dimension of cultural ecosystems.**

There is a need for a long-term process to monitor - consistently for the different subsectors, but within a culture-wide framework - internationalisation of cultural ecosystems in order to develop a concrete picture of trends on the ground and to evaluate the effects and impact of current international cultural policies.



A clear mandate, division of roles and capacity are needed in this area: who collects and analyses (most likely intermediary organisations) and who provides guidance, so that this data collection and analysis is consistent, so that the policy framework can also be evaluated. Focusing on an evidence-based ICP requires investment in people and resources for both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis and the direction of the monitoring process, and this from a long-term perspective.

This process is **both quantitative and qualitative**.

- On the one hand, it may be interesting to track, disclose and analyse certain key figures about internationalisation from a long-term perspective. In any case, there is a need for consistent data collection and analysis over a longer period of time. Cf. [DutchCulture Database | DutchCulture | Your partner for international cultural ambitions](#).
- On the other hand, the above Field Drawing shows that both the how and what of international working in cultural ecosystems is subject to shift in a rapidly changing social context. For this reason, it is important not to frame the monitoring process in purely quantitative terms, but also to see it as a learning process: a continual loop of initiative and experimentation, (collective) evaluation, and adjustment around a central question: how can those involved together harness the cultural and social potential of international work within cultural ecosystems?

There is a need for experimentation and research and development in the area of data collection and analysis, for example in terms of using data collected on digital platforms and social media. There are interesting experiments in this area, both among sector players and within intermediary organisations. But these are running into limits as many (commercial) platforms close their doors for the reuse of data. Invest (together with the centres of expertise) in a sustainable data tool that maps - per cultural sector - the international presence. A tool that can also inspire artists and actors developing an international pathway.

5.4. Complementary cooperation between government bodies and intermediary organisations

- **In a context in which, on the one hand, many initiatives have been phased out and, on the other, the need for coordination and urgency is greater than ever, there is a need for a new elan for coordination and cooperation between intermediary bodies and government actors (including regional and urban) in the field of international cultural policy.**

Working together towards strategy development. The above outline for a robust and resilient international strategy development can be a starting point: with clear guidance from the various stakeholders involved (government bodies and sectoral intermediary organisations) to draw a common line and action plan, according to the building blocks described above.

Work together towards implementation. At the same time, it is also important to stay engaged at the operational level. Here too, a long-term operational perspective is (still) needed. There is a need for a relaunch for Flanders Culture with a different modus operandi that allows for longer-term coordination on synergies between sectoral and diplomatic initiatives.

Different working models for cooperation/alignment between government bodies and/or intermediary players are possible:



- The above-mentioned ideas require both bilateral and joint consultation, both coordination within the intermediary organisations (between sectoral support centres and funds), and within government bodies (mutual consultation between DCYM, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, FIT and VISITFLANDERS), based on clear guidance (perhaps a role for DCYM to coordinate consultation and strategy development).
- This alignment/coordination can be achieved with different levels of ambition. The current approach is network-based, whereby the actors in question are given a strategic framework, and interpret this framework relatively autonomously based on their core tasks. Since these core tasks differ, there is a 'complementary' approach, where initiatives from very different objectives are placed alongside each other to look for opportunities from there, rather than thinking through to a consistent plan of action from the three objectives, with coordination on implementation.
- Other working models and organisational forms for monitoring International Cultural Policy are conceivable.
 - o Comparison with the Netherlands: Dutch Culture as an umbrella policy actor jointly funded from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Foreign Affairs, as a link between sectoral actors (all national funds, such as Fonds Podiumkunsten, Mondriaan Fonds and also sectoral institutions like Dutch Music Export or Het Nieuwe Instituut) and the foreign delegations, EU desks and also increasingly regional and urban.
 - o Comparison with Event Flanders model: one operational cell for international cultural policy, from a joint steering committee with different policy areas.
- We reiterate that coordination and alignment depends on essential preconditions, such as support at the management level and sufficient operational capacity among all stakeholders.

In any case, it is essential to specify an actor who can proactively play a guiding role in International Cultural Policy. This includes tasks such as implementing the ICP, policy development, coordination and regular communication with all stakeholders (actors in the field, the intermediary organisations, government bodies), as well as participation in relevant international policy networks for knowledge sharing. In addition to more active government direction, the ICP could benefit in this transformation from a proactive quartermaster for international cultural policy - to achieve clear direction and shared vision development in cocreation with the various stakeholders, with room for cross-sectoral and cross-sectoral networking.

