

WORLD CITIES CULTURE TRENDS 2025

10 global trends for culture in cities

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The 2025 Trends Report builds on insights from our Cities and the 13th World Cities Culture Summit under the theme ‘**Tomorrow’s Culture: How Will the Next Generation Shape Our World?**’ hosted by the city of Dubai from 30th October to 1st November 2024.

The Summit was held in the Middle East and North Africa region for the first time and explored how cities can empower the next generation of creatives. Over three days, leaders shared ideas, forged connections, and reimagined how culture can be the golden thread that unites cities and communities for a thriving future.

Over a third of the global population is under 25, and culture is a vital factor in shaping their values, aspirations and sense of identity. The Summit emphasised the importance of engaging young people and developing cultural policies that authentically reflect their voices.

In a rapidly changing world, culture has a significant role to play in the key issues affecting both current and future generations such as the climate crisis, technological development, and mass migration. This is reinforced by our ongoing campaign for culture to be at the heart of global development with a standalone *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in the post-2030 agenda*.

In this 2025 edition of the World Cities Culture Trends report we look at ten emerging trends in cultural policy, with examples of how cities are putting ideas into action.



→ Dubai Summit © Courtesy of Dubai Culture & Arts Authority



→ © Courtesy of Dubai Culture & Arts Authority

WHAT OUR CITY LEADERS SAID

“GREAT MINDS IN A TRULY DIVERSE NETWORK.”

“IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL AND INSPIRING MEETING, GATHERING CITIES ON ITS DIFFERENCES BUT ALSO COMMON GOALS.”

“INSPIRING AND INFLUENTIAL TO MAKING POSITIVE IMPACTS IN OUR COMMUNITIES’ CULTURAL POLICY.”

“A PROFOUNDLY STIMULATING AND ENCOURAGING PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, THAT WILL IMPACT MY WORK FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.”

“A FAMILY OF GLOBAL VISIONARIES AND CHANGER-MAKERS WHO ARE COMMITTED FOR A SUSTAINABLE BETTER FUTURE.”

WORLD CITIES CULTURE SUMMIT DUBAI HIGHLIGHTS

“Tomorrow’s Culture: How Will the Next Generation Shape Our World?”

- Attended by over **150 senior leaders from 36 global cities**.
- Featured a **Public Session** available free online, *“Tomorrow’s Talent: What Do Creatives Need from Cities?”*

- Published **new research** *“Nothing About Us Without Us: Youth and Culture in Global Cities Today,”* highlighting culture’s role in youth empowerment and civic engagement.
- Launched the third round of our flagship *Leadership Exchange Programme*, supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, to share solutions on common issues.
- Highlighted the role of **African cities** as hubs of innovation and creativity with leaders from Accra, Dakar, Freetown, Africa No Filter and Moleskine Foundation in collaboration with Africa-Europe Mayor’s Dialogue and LAGO Collective.
- Led our first **Nighttime Policy Accelerator** to enhance cities’ cultural strategies after dark in collaboration with VibeLab consultants.
- Announced **new partnerships** with Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Fundação Itaú, and programme partners including Arup, Community Jameel and Julie’s Bicycle.
- Showcased the past, present and future of **Emirati culture** at iconic venues including Al Shindagha Museum, Alserkal Avenue and Mohammed bin Rashid Library, alongside contributions from local creative talent.

Read more about the 2024 World Cities Culture Summit [here](#).



10 TRENDS FOR CULTURAL POLICY IN 2025

- 1. Young People: Taking the lead in urban culture**
In 2025, young leaders will continue to drive culture, redefining the future of urban creativity.
- 2. Technology and AI: Transforming culture**
In 2025, cities will create policies and programmes to use new technologies while tackling issues of ethics and inclusion.
- 3. Global tourism: Balancing growth and sustainability**
In 2025, cities will prioritise sustainable tourism, with growing trends like film tourism whilst balancing the needs between visitors and local residents.
- 4. The Climate Crisis: Enhancing culture's role**
In 2025, cities will ask that culture is part of city-wide climate policies with culture-led climate action.
- 5. Protecting space: Making space for culture within rapid urbanisation**
In 2025, cities will support and protect cultural spaces as a key part of social infrastructure for their citizens.
- 6. Culture after dark: Taking centre stage in cities**
In 2025, there will be more 24-hour cities with culture as a driver of an inclusive nightlife.
- 7. Celebrating heritage: Intangible, indigenous, endangered**
In 2025, cities will continue to celebrate and protect intangible, indigenous and endangered cultural heritage.
- 8. Culture for all: Can we do it?**
In 2025, cities will continue to view culture as a human right, taking steps to offer opportunities to all citizens and tackling social, economic, and physical barriers.
- 9. Culture and Migration: Supporting a changing population**
In 2025, cities will attract international talent and support communities who experience forced migration.
- 10. Creative Health: Essential to our wellbeing**
In 2025, cities will expand culture programmes that tackle health, isolation and improve citizens' quality of life.

→ © Courtesy of Dubai Culture & Arts Authority



TREND 1 YOUNG PEOPLE: TAKING THE LEAD IN URBAN CULTURE

With 70% of the world's population expected to be urban by 2050, and 60% of city's population in developing countries under the age of 30, engaging the next generation is an urgent priority. Our new report, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Youth and Culture in Global Cities Today*, highlights this growing trend.

- **Creative Education:** Despite budget pressures, cities are finding new ways to integrate creativity into curriculums, with cities such as *Abu Dhabi*, *Barcelona*, *Oslo* and *Taipei* growing arts in schools.
- **Early Years:** Cities are recognising creativity as a human right for every child for example in *Helsinki's Culture Kids Initiative* and *Paris' Art to Grow Up scheme*.
- **Youth Voice:** Young people are shaping cultural policies through initiatives like *Dubai's Youth Circles*, *Hamburg's Youth Manifesto* and *Hong Kong's youth advisory committee members*.
- **Creative Careers:** Cities are increasing support to access jobs in culture and the creative industries, from *Dakar* and *Paris collaboration to support young entrepreneurs*, and *Brasilia's creative skills programme*, to *Los Angeles County's internship initiative* and *São Paulo's Programa Joven Mointor/a Cultural*.

In 2025, young leaders will continue to drive culture, redefining the future of urban creativity.

→ © City of Abu Dhabi



TREND 2 TECHNOLOGY AND AI: TRANSFORMING CULTURE

Technology and AI are reshaping arts and culture, offering opportunities while raising challenges including the digital divide as well as intellectual property, ethics and bias. Cities must ensure innovation remains inclusive and have a say in future AI legislation.

- **Empowering Creatives:** Cities are helping creatives access tools and training to harness the potential of technology, initiatives like *Dubai Institute for Design and Innovation's* efforts to future proof creative training and *Los Angeles' initiatives to increase digital access*.
- **Access to culture:** Cities are leveraging technology to improve access to culture. In *Kyiv*, digital archives are crucial for *capturing the war's impact* on Ukrainian culture, while *Vienna's work in digitalisation* aims to democratise access to culture.
- **Immersive Experiences:** Innovative uses of immersive technology, like *Nanjing's immersive heritage* experiences and *Stockholm's VR training for library staff*.
- **Past in the present:** Technology is reinterpreting history and making heritage more accessible to modern audiences from *Bengaluru's new innovation museum* to researchers in *Istanbul's use of AI to interpret archaeological tablets*.

In 2025, cities will create new policies and programmes to use new technologies while tackling issues of ethics and inclusion.

→ © City of Nanjing



TREND 3 GLOBAL TOURISM: BALANCING GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY



→ © City of Seoul

Tourism is rebounding strongly post-COVID-19, with culture recognised as a key driver. While many cities are focused on boosting the visitor economy, others are balancing growth (and over-tourism) with the needs of residents and local culture.

- **New hotspots:** Cities like *Dubai*, *Chengdu*, *Guangzhou* and *Jakarta*, and are redefining global tourism with cultural festivals, modern attractions, and unique heritage experiences becoming must-visit destinations.
- **Balancing growth:** Cities are addressing tourism pressures with innovative measures, such as *Barcelona's strategies to cap tourism numbers*, *Edinburgh's proposed Visitor Levy*, and *San Francisco's Hotel Tax*.
- **Screen Tourism:** Film, TV, and video games are increasingly driving global tourism, with 60% of London visits influenced by film. Initiatives like *Abu Dhabi Film Commission* to *Film London*, and *Seoul's Film Commission* are leveraging this trend through targeted programmes to boost local opportunities.

In 2025, cities will prioritise sustainable tourism, with growing trends like film tourism whilst balancing the needs between visitors and local residents.

TREND 4 THE CLIMATE CRISIS: ENHANCING CULTURE'S ROLE

Culture is increasingly central to addressing the climate crisis. More than just raising awareness, culture can drive creative solutions, inspire action, and foster collaboration. Initiatives like the *Group of Friends for Culture and Climate* established at COP28 showcase a growing movement to demonstrate culture's value in climate action, but there is still untapped potential that we need to collectively unlock.



→ © Alserkal Avenue, City of Dubai

- **City wide policy:** Cities like *Amsterdam* and *Edinburgh*, are launching new cultural policies and advocating for culture's inclusion in city wide climate policy.
- **Decarbonising culture:** Cities are actively working to decarbonise the culture sector including *Cologne's training for cultural organisations*, *London's sector guidance* and *Materials for the Arts* in *New York*.
- **Citizen action:** Culture is galvanising citizen action from promoting traditional seasonal cuisine in *Chengdu* as a *UNESCO City of Gastronomy* and *Hong Kong's Junk!* programme encouraging collective responsibility and community participation.
- **Supporting pedestrianisation:** Culture is supporting pedestrian initiatives, reducing pollution in cities such as *Barcelona*, *Brussels*, *Rio de Janeiro* and *Seoul*.

In 2025, cities will ask that culture is part of city-wide climate policies with culture-led climate action.

TREND 5 PROTECTING SPACE: MAKING SPACE FOR CULTURE WITHIN RAPID URBANISATION

Rapid urbanisation means that culture spaces are often under threat from development and increasing costs. Cities worldwide are developing policies to make space for culture: from protecting grassroots and community spaces to securing affordable and inclusive creative workspace (from artist studios to rehearsal and production space).

- **Affordable workspace:** Cities are investing in sustainable, long-term solutions, from **Sydney's** new *Creative Land Trust* to empowering tenants impacted by the insolvency of **Toronto's** *Artscape*, ensuring creatives thrive despite rising urban costs.

- **Grassroots Support:** From **Los Angeles** to **Barcelona** and **Cologne**, cities are mapping and enhancing support for grassroots organisations and initiatives including funding, tax relief, subsidies, planning protection, and advocacy.

- **Creative and cultural districts:** This is now a global phenomenon from **Jakarta** to **Dubai**, with new initiatives launching in **Austin**, and **London's** *East Bank*, shaping new cultural landscapes and fostering innovation.

- **Culture's civic role:** Cultural spaces are civic institutions and play a key role in meaningfully engaging with citizens, from **Helsinki's** *Oodi Library*, and **Seoul's** *Outdoor Library initiative*, to key services integrated in *SESC*, **São Paulo**.

In 2025, cities will support and protect cultural spaces as a key part of social infrastructure for their citizens.



→ © City of Helsinki

TREND 6 CULTURE AFTER DARK: TAKING CENTRE STAGE IN CITIES

For too long the night was seen as a nuisance for policy makers. Yet, as more cities become 24hr cities, culture is leading the change. Nighttime culture is becoming a key focus for global cities, with nearly 100 cities with dedicated nighttime roles and UNESCO recognising clubs as Intangible Cultural Heritage. As more cities innovate in this area, definitions of nighttime culture are expanding and becoming more inclusive.

- **A broader nightlife:** Night culture is more than nightclubs from **Seoul's *night markets*** to **Ramadan Nights** in **Dubai**, and **Buenos Aires *La Noche de las Librerías***.
- **Illuminating the night:** Light festivals are now a truly global phenomenon with vibrant programmes being delivered from **Stockholm**, to **Seoul** and **Guangzhou**.
- **Inclusive and safe nights:** Cities like **Amsterdam** are fostering inclusive nighttime culture through a new Institute for NightCulture and support for venues including queer space **Club Raum**, while **Brussels** is leading initiatives to improve safety for women and marginalised groups.

In 2025, there will be more 24-hour cities with culture as a driver of an inclusive nightlife.

→ © City of Amsterdam



TREND 7 CELEBRATING HERITAGE: INTANGIBLE, INDIGENOUS, ENDANGERED

Heritage is at the heart of urban identity as cities work to safeguard, celebrate, and innovate their tangible and intangible cultural heritage. However, heritage is increasingly under threat in our rapidly changing world from development pressures, the climate crisis and technology. Through citizen engagement, and the recognition of diverse heritage, cities are developing new connections, memory, and celebrating their identity.

- **Preserving intangible heritage:** Cities are preserving intangible cultural heritage by raising awareness through citizen participation like **Abu Dhabi's *Artisan Register***, **Jakarta's *traditional folk games revival*** and **Edinburgh's annual *Gaelic Week***.
- **Celebrating indigenous heritage:** Cities are advancing indigenous cultural heritage and voices like **Los Angeles County's *Native American Indian Commission***, **Montréal's *First Peoples' Festival*** and **Melbourne's *YIRRAMBOI Festival***.
- **Recognising diverse heritage expressions:** Cities are recognising new forms of intangible cultural heritage such as **Warsaw's *urban intangible heritage register***, **the London Museum's focus on collecting everyday objects and stories**, and **Stockholm's *renewed support for indigenous languages***.
- **Safeguarding heritage:** Cities are working to preserve and safeguard heritage such as **Istanbul's *Beyoğlu Culture Route*** and **Vancouver's *China Town Cultural Heritage Assets Management Plan***.

→ © City of Jakarta



In 2025, cities will continue to celebrate and protect intangible, indigenous and endangered cultural heritage.

TREND 8 CULTURE FOR ALL: CAN WE DO IT?

Culture is a human right, yet it is still not accessible to all citizens. Cities are taking bold steps to ensure cultural opportunities are open to all focusing on equitable programmes that engage diverse communities and address social, economic, and physical barriers.

- **Disability inclusive culture:** Initiatives like **Tokyo's** *Grant for Accessibility* and **Warsaw's** *Culture Without Barriers Festival* highlight cities' efforts to improve access to cultural spaces and services for people with disabilities.

- **Creativity across the city:** Cities are making culture accessible to all by offering cultural programmes in local spaces including **Rio de Janeiro's** *Libraries for Tomorrow*, **Taipei's** *Culture in the Alley* and **Dublin's** *Creative Hubs*.

- **Equity based funding:** Cities including **Montréal**, and **Zurich** are allocating increased resources to support underrepresented communities and promote cultural equity through funding programmes.

- **Representation in public space:** Embracing impermanence, cities are democratising access and public realm through street art, from **Lisbon's** *urban art gallery* to **São Paulo's** *Street Art Museum*, **Milan's** *neighbourhood mural project* and **Melbourne's** *Stolen Generations Marker*.

- **African cities, global voices:** African cities like **Accra**, **Dakar**, and **Freetown** are becoming influential on the international stage, driving growth and changing perceptions. More information in our *African Alternatives* report.

In 2025, cities will continue to view culture as a human right, taking steps to offer opportunities to all citizens and tackling social, economic, and physical barriers.



→ © City of Sao Paulo

TREND 9 CULTURE AND MIGRATION: SUPPORTING A CITY'S CHANGING POPULATION

Culture is playing a pivotal role in helping cities respond to shifting demographics, as new residents arrive, and others depart in search of opportunities. Through innovative policies and community-driven initiatives, culture has the power to build bridges, foster connections, and enhance urban vibrancy.

- **Attracting international talent:** Cities are supporting artists and cultural professionals from other countries, including **Hamburg's *Intro Programme*** for those who had to leave their country of residence and **Dubai's *Creative Visa***.
- **Responding to forced migration:** Cities are supporting communities with experience of forced migration including **Brussels' *MigratieMuseumMigration***, **Warsaw's *training for cultural organisations*** to **Oslo's *city of refuge scheme*** supporting persecuted artists.
- **Celebrating diversity:** Cities are celebrating and recognising their changing populations. Examples include **London's *public transport renaming***, **San Francisco's *Cultural District Program*** and **Cologne's *Museum's multilingual tours***.

In 2025, cities will attract international talent and support communities who experience forced migration.



TREND 10 CREATIVE HEALTH: ESSENTIAL TO OUR WELLBEING

The evidence is clear: taking part in culture and creative activities is a powerful force for supporting our health and wellbeing. Cities are expanding pilots to improve citizens' quality of life and reduce isolation with the aim to scale their impact. But we are still only just beginning to unlock culture's full potential, and it is now time to acknowledge culture as a core component of health.

- **Health interventions:** Targeted creative health interventions and partnerships continue to grow such as **Oslo's *expansion of dementia choirs***.
- **Using art to help trauma:** The power of creativity to support recovery from ongoing trauma is being utilised in **Kyiv** where *art therapy programmes are expanding*.
- **Scaling creative health:** Now that the evidence is clear, cities are beginning to invest in scaling up creative health activity, evidenced by **London's *Creative Health Report***, to the nationwide arts and health programmes being delivered in **Scotland** through *Healing Arts Scotland*.
- **Heritage and wellbeing:** A visit to a local heritage site has been found to *boost happiness by 93%* with cities from **Vancouver** to **Abu Dhabi** enhancing their local heritage for citizen access and connecting them to shared history.

In 2025, cities will expand culture programmes that tackle health, isolation and improve citizens' quality of life.



WORLD CITIES CULTURE FORUM

World Cities Culture Forum is the leading global network of civic leaders from over 40 creative cities from across six continents. Our leaders share ideas and solutions to build a world where culture is at the heart of thriving cities. We have established the principle that culture is a golden thread in cities: supporting communities, improving health and wellbeing, attracting tourists and boosting economies.

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