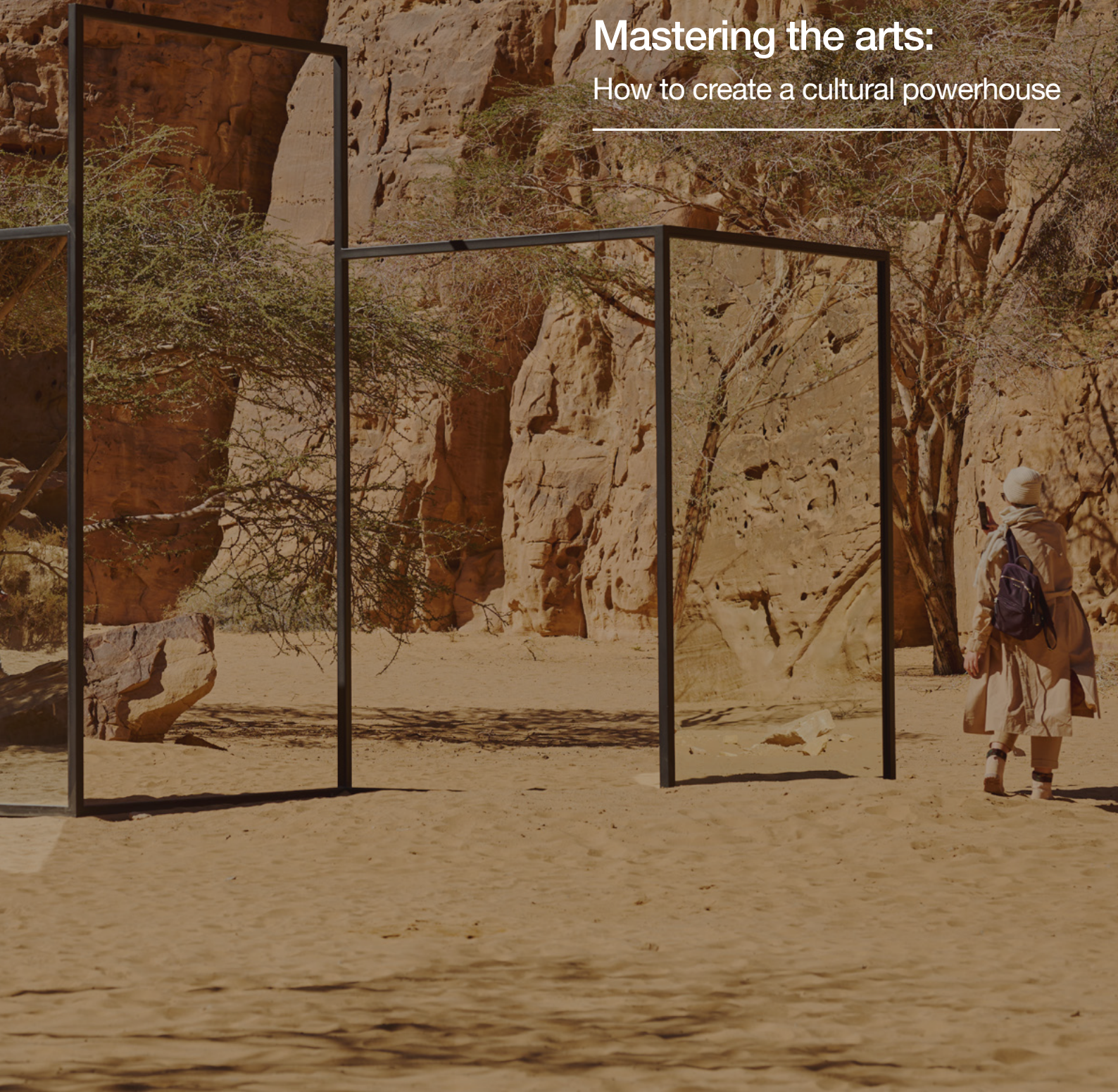


Visionary realms

Mastering the arts:

How to create a cultural powerhouse





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FT LONGITUDE

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Introduction



Why invest in culture and the creative industries?

Culture and the creative industries can often be overlooked by policymakers and planners as valuable drivers of economic growth and important parts of sustainable and regenerative development.

But in some ambitious and imaginative development projects around the world, culture is being put centre stage. Cultural master planners in these locations are tuning in to the power of culture to drive economic growth and an authentic sense of identity both for residents and potential visitors.

By investing in and reinterpreting a place's unique cultural heritage, decision makers are doing two things: they are breathing new life into forgotten histories, and they are providing a unique platform for important social conversations about today's challenges. As they do this, they are putting new names on the world's cultural map and creating enormous value for the tourism sector.

Their global impact comes from a localised placemaking approach that enables communities to shape where they live. These communities can benefit from an ecosystem of access and opportunity that is unlocked by cultural and creative expression, actively reinterpret and reinvigorate their culture for today's world, become guardians of the local natural landscape and capitalise on new economic opportunities, such as cultural tourism.

This report explores how this inclusive, community-first mindset is informing some of the world's most intriguing cultural projects, creating ways to engage with overlooked parts of humanity's cultural heritage and with some of the biggest challenges we collectively and fuelling the rise of new cultural powerhouses that will shape global culture in the years ahead.



One of the most important trends in cultural policy is the growing emphasis on everyday creativity: the idea that every community and every individual has creative capacity. They should be provided with resources and infrastructure that create opportunities to express that creativity and enjoy a more creative life.

Dr Hye-Kyung Lee

Professor of cultural policy,
King's College London

1

From the ground up:

New ways to create a cultural powerhouse

Some of the most striking approaches to boosting the cultural and creative sectors are coming from outside the west.

From the development of cultural and creative industries that are reshaping global tastes to the redevelopment of ancient sites that tell us about our shared heritage, cultural master planners and policymakers are finding new ways to tap into the power of culture.



The Korean Wave: Directing investment in culture

Some of the most striking innovations in policy support for culture and the creative sectors come from Asian nations, says Dr Hye-Kyung Lee, professor of cultural policy at King's College London.

“In many non-western societies, including advanced economies such as Japan, South Korea and China, there is a consciousness about how to promote or preserve culture identity and support local cultural expressions,” says Lee.

This consciousness has led different levels of government to make strategic interventions.

“Policymakers, including central and local governments, are willing to support cultural institutions,” says Lee. “So that diverse cultural expressions can be created and people can easily access cultural opportunities.”

Over the past 30 years, South Korea has been one of the biggest successes. The so-called Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, has introduced the world to music in the form of chart-topping ‘K-pop’ groups; film, including the Oscar-winning *Parasite*; and television, such as the smash-hit Netflix series *Squid Game*.

This is no accident. Successive governments in South Korea have taken a strategic view of the value of cultural and creative activity — one that is partly economic, but also partly because they understand that there is more at stake. The democratic environment and freedom of expression also greatly contribute to the nation’s cultural success. “Many people are now talking about Korea’s soft power. Behind this, there are various factors:

democracy, innovative content creation driven by market forces as well as state support,” says Lee. “Of course, culture can be used to promote the nation on the global stage.”

Investment in education and skills has helped to develop the talent that is now driving Korea’s successes. Another critical move by policymakers is an innovative approach to cultural financing. The government “tamed” venture capital funds, says Lee, working closely with investors to help accelerate the growth of creative startups and cultural production projects: “This venture capital market for culture, which was the invention of the South Korean government’s cultural and industrial policy, has had a huge impact.”

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Many people are now talking about soft power and cultural democracy. Culture can be used to promote the nation on the global stage.

Dr Hye-Kyung Lee

Professor of cultural policy,
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Financing cultural startups

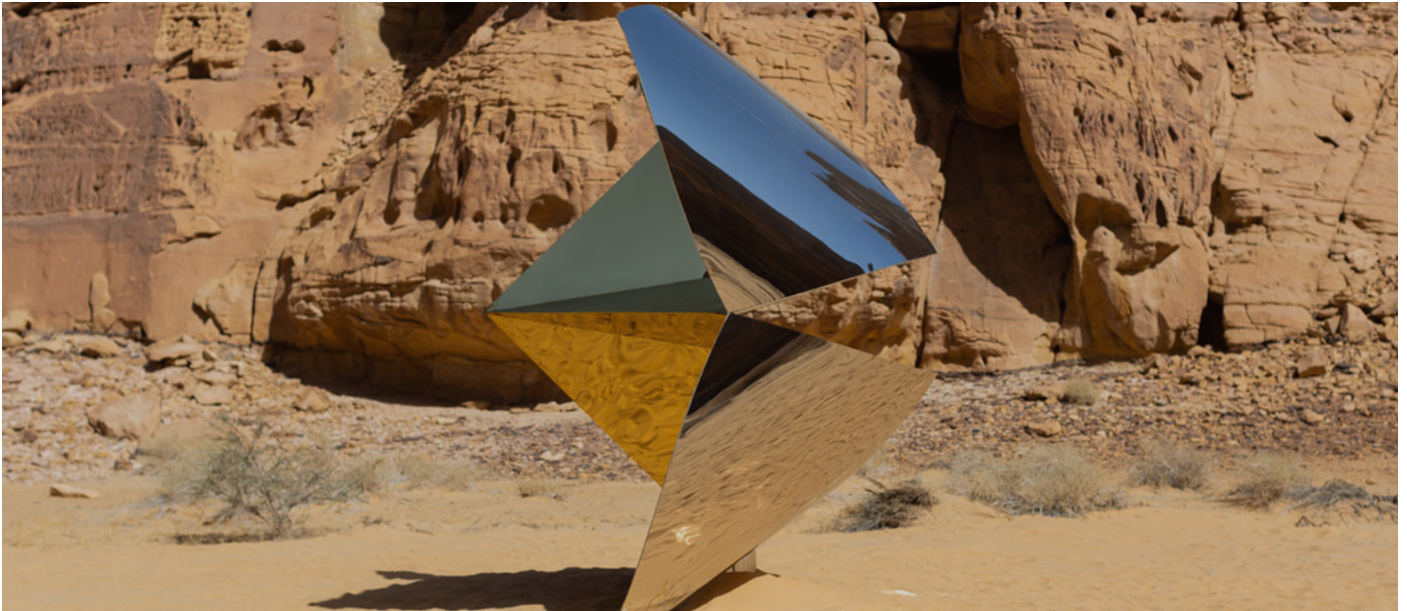
To create vibrant cultural and creative sectors, policymakers need to recognise the importance of helping fledgling ventures get off the ground, says Mike van Graan, an independent theatre entrepreneur and former president of the African Cultural Policy Network.

“Because of the precarious nature of the arts with their irregular and inconsistent streams of income, it’s very difficult for artists to get funding from traditional sources like the banks,” says Van Graan.

It’s important to recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all funding mechanism. “Policymakers should acknowledge the different roles that the arts play within society and fund them accordingly,” says Van Graan. “Arts that deliver a social benefit – for example, a play that validates and affirms women in a patriarchal society – would need resources from a public funding agency such as a National Arts Council, because these are unlikely to raise sufficient funding via the box office,” he explains.

“But for creative enterprises that could have a commercial future but face significant barriers getting started –musicals, for example – corporate sponsorship could be the answer, says Van Graan. “And then there is also a need for policies and funding mechanisms that support smaller creative startups, such as low-interest loans or grants,” he adds. Subsidies and low-rent or rent-free premises can also help cultural startups to get off the ground.





AIUla, Saudi Arabia: A vision shaped by culture and nature

Another country pioneering new approaches to investment in culture and creative sectors is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is pursuing a range of ambitious cultural programmes — among them, the visionary redevelopment of the historic county of AIUla.

Here, culture is at the heart of an ongoing transformation. AIUla's Journey Through Time Masterplan is an ambitious vision for a holistic approach to planning within a cultural landscape that is respectful of the county framework's 12 development principles. Chief among them are reconnecting people with the natural and cultural landscape and revitalising sites of heritage into vital places of learning, cultural development and social connection.

So, investment is being channelled by the government into community arts centres, the revitalisation of entire neighbourhoods as new cultural hubs and international arts festivals that attract global talent.

The approach pursued in AIUla is designed to be joined up, says Kate Hall-Tipping, cultural sector planning executive director at the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU): "We take an integrated, creative multi-dimensional approach that ensures the uniqueness of AIUla — in terms of its natural and cultural heritage, its communities, its identity — is respected, preserved and celebrated."



We take an integrated, creative, multi-dimensional approach that ensures the uniqueness of AIUla — in terms of its natural and cultural heritage, its communities, its identity — is respected, preserved and celebrated.

Kate Hall-Tipping

Cultural sector planning executive director,
RCU



Developing the AlJadidah Arts District

In AIUla, investment in the AlJadidah Arts District is rejuvenating a neighbourhood and creating new cultural opportunities that span local and global influences.

Its cornerstone is the Madrasat Addeera. Originally the Old Girls' School, this is now a creative hub whose mission is to teach the local community traditional handicrafts and arts, including stone-carving, palm weaving, jewellery, embroidery and ceramics.

The benefits are multi-layered, explains Nora Aldabal, arts and creative industries executive director at RCU. "It offers long-term skills development and training in design and craft for the community, but it also offers an opportunity for visitors and tourists to experience the local culture."

And while the centre's programme is rooted in the region's historic cultural heritage, it also provides a space for fresh interpretations, explains RCU's Kate Hall-Tipping. "We're teaching traditional arts, but it's the creative interpretation of those traditions that turns this into living heritage and contemporary art expression," says Hall-Tipping. "We've started to see that flourish in AIUla."

Beyond the Madrasat Addeera, AlJadidah's success as a creative hub within AIUla hinges on an integrated, multi-faceted approach. It is home, for instance, to the new Design Space AIUla, which is the region's first permanent contemporary gallery space dedicated to showcasing the works of both local and international creatives. There is also the AIUla Music Hub, an open-air cinema, culinary outlets and a public library, that serves as a multi-purpose community nucleus. Work is also underway on an arts foundation that will provide an access point for everything happening in the neighbourhood.

Partnerships, meanwhile, are another crucial element of the strategy for establishing AIUla's brand as a cultural destination, says Aldabal. The Contemporary Art Museum has been developed in partnership with Paris's Centre Pompidou, for instance, and will show major works by global artists. In 2023, the director of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, US, brought 70 Warhol works to AIUla. "Partners are key stakeholders in our development," says Aldabal. "Dialogue, exchange and learning from one another are very important."



Iñaki Azkuna [former Mayor of Bilbao] was able to implement change over the longer term and take a masterplan approach.

Kate Hall-Tipping

Cultural sector planning executive director,
RCU

Beyond Bilbao

Conversations about culture’s role in destination development sometimes centre on flagship institutions and iconic buildings. This kind of strategy can create an effective focal point, helping to change a destination’s brand, and can have a magnetic effect on tourists.

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, for instance, celebrated its best-ever year in 2023, with more than 1.3 million visitors passing through its galleries. But the secret of Bilbao’s success might be less obvious. For example, political continuity has allowed for a steady strategic approach and long-term commitment. Iñaki Azkuna was the city’s mayor between 1999 and 2014 and won the 2012 World Mayor Prize for his transformation of industrial Bilbao into a cultural centre. “He was able to implement change over the longer term and take a masterplan approach,” says Hall-Tipping. “bringing lots of different elements together.”

That joined-up approach — more than the effects of a single iconic building — was critical.

Investment in cultural infrastructure is booming

For cultural infrastructure, such as museums and galleries, performing arts centres, multi-function arts venues and cultural districts, investment rebounded strongly in 2022 after a slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to AEA Consulting's latest Cultural Infrastructure Index, 225 new projects were announced in 2022, and these were valued at an estimated \$7.3bn. Over the past seven years, the number of announced projects has increased by an average of 9 per cent annually. And although investments are dominated by museums and galleries, multi-function arts venues, such as 92NY in New York, grew in popularity in 2022. Creating clusters of cultural facilities is another growing priority, with a 47 per cent increase in the number of projects commissioned to develop cultural districts.

Investments in Australia, China, the UK and the US together accounted for 66 per cent of total investments. But there was significant growth elsewhere. In India, for instance, investment more than tripled, from \$51mn to \$235mn.



2

People and culture: Communities are in the driving seat

One of the most powerful shifts in cultural development planning and policy is a new emphasis on the role of the community. Trailblazing leaders are increasingly recognising the importance of ensuring communities engage in cultural expression and enjoy the benefits of a vibrant cultural and creative scene. They are also recognising the need to empower the community in preserving, revitalising and reinterpreting culture.



The case for culture

From a policy perspective, there are three models for thinking about culture and creative industries, according to Mike van Graan.

The first model is based on human rights, an ‘arts for human development’ approach. As [Article 27 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights](#) establishes: “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community” and to enjoy the arts. This was at the root of policy in South Africa’s post-Apartheid years, and it remains relevant in many parts of the world, where poorer communities still lack access to cultural facilities. It’s also a model that affirms freedom of creative expression by making available the resources necessary to create and distribute art.

The second model is ‘art for social development’ that instrumentalises art for a socially-beneficial end such as a play that promotes education about HIV/AIDS and its prevention, or a music concert that promotes anti-xenophobia messaging. This would require corporate social investment (rather than marketing funding) or public resources from a health ministry.

The third approach, which has been influential in recent years, is a “market driven, creative industries model,” says Van Graan. Driven by countries in the global North and spread around the world by organisations such as the British Council, it prioritises supporting commercially viable creative sectors. “The funding models and the policy interventions are fundamentally different from the first and second models,” says Van Graan.

He proposes a broader lens that advocates as “cultural policy as opposed to arts policy”. It recognises the broad value of culture. “It has to do with values and worldviews and ways of making meaning for individuals and communities around the world, which shapes the way that people relate to each other,” says Van Graan. “Instead of sitting within a particular silo in an arts and culture ministry, this understanding and practice of cultural policy needs to have a presence in all of the different ministries across government.”

There is growing recognition of the value of cultural activity on its own terms, as part of what shapes a community’s identity. “There’s been a bit of a shift in the past two or three years away from the market-driven notion of creative industries and towards recognition of culture as public goods in their own right,” says Van Graan. “People are not just physical entities — they have emotional, psychological and intellectual needs. That means supporting culture and the arts as public goods because of the roles they play in human, social and economic development.”

“Each of these roles should be funded by different mechanisms,” says Van Graan. “These could include a National Arts Council to fund art for human development, the arts in their own right; corporate social investment and public funding to support art that has direct social benefits and for which there may not be markets, but audiences that need to benefit from their messaging, and low-interest loans and venture funding for art that has economic development potential.”



Policymakers often look at economic measures of impact, like the number of jobs supported, as the endpoint — rather than a brilliant by-product of getting culture right.

Sally Shaw

Director,
Firstsite

Shaw warns that public funding for culture and the arts is under pressure in the UK, and she is concerned about whether policy frameworks do enough to encourage access to cultural activities for all. “It doesn’t feel like funding and support are thought about in the right way, and that’s because culture is not being thought about in the right way,” says Shaw. “Policymakers often look at economic measures of impact, like the number of jobs supported, as the endpoint — rather than a brilliant byproduct of getting culture right.”

But as other policymakers are recognising, getting culture right comes with a broad range of benefits. It can bring communities together to take ownership of their cultural life and provide a cohesive identity that can make new towns and cities burgeoning destinations for cultural tourism.

Communities must shape their cultural destiny

A community-led vision of cultural activity that emphasises everyday creativity and gets communities to shape culture has significant implications for policymakers.

Kate Hall-Tipping gives the example of the museums being developed in AIUla. “We really want them to be community-led and inclusive,” she says. “We are guided by the definition of a museum adopted by the International Council of Museums in 2022, which states that museums are ‘institutions in the service of society [...] Open to the public, accessible and inclusive.’”

So AIUla’s five museums are accessible and community led, says Hall-Tipping. “Museums should be places of open dialogue and social connection. In AIUla, our museums will be safe environments where people can have debates and host discourse and discussions — academic or otherwise — about topics that are important to them. Our museums will be places where people come together and engage in these conversations. As culture sector planners, we have an obligation to listen and let communities evolve in the direction that they want — so that these institutions are guided by those who they serve.”

Culture in the community

The emphasis on culture as a public good can be found among innovative institutions around the world, including the ones that are challenging the status quo in developed nations.

One such body is Firstsite, a contemporary art gallery in Colchester in the UK. Its director Sally Shaw says that creative institutions thrive when they are close to their communities, engaging them in dialogue and finding innovative ways to authentically represent who they are.

With that mindset, Firstsite reaches far beyond the traditional remit for an art gallery. Its Holiday Fun programme, for instance, has targeted the 25 per cent of children in Colchester who are living in poverty. “We’ve provided 23,000 meals in seven years,” says Shaw. “That’s brought thousands of families into the art gallery for the first time.” By responding to the community’s immediate priorities, Firstsite has increased its reach and engaged more of the community in creative and cultural activities.



Reimagining the museum

Set to open to the public in autumn 2024, the John Randle Centre for Yoruba Culture and History in Lagos, Nigeria, is a vivid reimagining of the role of the museum. Designed to break free from Eurocentric views of African art, the museum is noisy, performative and vibrant. Crucially, Yoruba culture is front-and-centre, rather than being housed in the basement, as is often the case with African exhibitions in western institutions, explains Will Rea, the museum's head curator.

“For the first time, an African culture is represented to itself, for itself and beyond the limitations set by the colonial mode of museum display,” adds Rea. “Visitors can see this in everything from the structure of the building to the conceptual understanding of the exhibition demonstrating how traditions maintain their presence in the present and into the future.”

The museum aims to provide Lagosians — and tourists, both local and international — with an authentic view of Yoruba culture and its influence on global culture, from Brazilian salsa to Afrobeat.



Living heritage: Authenticity and cultural longevity

Communities also have a vital role in preserving and safeguarding their cultural heritage.

That priority is particularly acute in communities with long histories of settlement, where tangible heritage — including the built environment — is a significant part of the cultural heritage. Yasmine Makaroun, president of the International Council on Monuments and Sites of Lebanon (ICOMOS Lebanon), says this is particularly relevant in the Middle East. “For Lebanese people, for Syrian people, in Jordan and in the entire MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region, we have strong traditional societies,” says Makaroun. “Our connection with history is a day-to-day living concern.”

But today’s economic pressures can threaten that shared heritage. Tourists seeking picturesque traditional settings have led to an increased interest by investors in traditional buildings left abandoned as residents sought modern amenities. But the most recent boom has had unintended consequences. “We have seen a trend for designing buildings that create a fake heritage or fake history, in order to have something economically valuable,” says Makaroun. There is a concern that planning authorities will favour new-build projects over investments in the renovation of sites that are genuinely culturally significant.

Local authorities need to be cautious with strategic development. Winning community support is also vital. “The key for development at the local level is the participation of the local communities,” says Makaroun. The aim should be creating “living heritage”: adapting to modern needs and safeguarding historic neighbourhoods not as artifacts of the past but reviving them as places where today’s communities can thrive.



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Yasmine Makaroun

President,
ICOMOS Lebanon

3

Culture platforms:

Destination development influences the global dialogue

Development projects can create new platforms for art and culture that become key drivers behind the rejuvenation of a place and a community. Investments in cultural platforms have the power to shift dialogues, allowing communities to take ownership of their culture and their identity and to tell different stories to the world. That can challenge assumptions — and help redefine the ‘brand’ of a destination as an emerging cultural powerhouse and create a holistic, authentic perception of that place.

At AIUla, the centrality of culture to the Masterplan guiding its development reflects the long history of human habitation in the area, which stretches back 200,000 years. The current project needs to be seen in the context of that history, says Kate Hall-Tipping. “AIUla has thousands of years of cultural history. We’re just adding a new chapter, a new layer, to that history.”

Redeveloping AIUla as a cultural destination is an opportunity to tell new stories about the region and its people, explains Hall-Tipping. “For example, outside of the region, the richness of cultural practice may not have had the platform that it deserves — but this is changing. AIUla is at a crest of supporting history-making artists who are giving rich new perspectives, both historical and contemporary.”



“

Art galleries are the places where we can imagine many different futures, from many different perspectives. It's about coming together to imagine and communicate the future.

Sally Shaw

Director,
Firstsite

Knowledge exchange is a critical development lever

Elsewhere, emerging cultural destinations are collaborating and forming networks to exchange knowledge and ideas as they seek to develop further. In many cases, they are forging new models rooted in their unique heritage.

That trend is highlighted in the 2024 [African Alternatives](#) report by the World Cities Culture Forum, a global network of over 40 creative cities that aims to place culture at the heart of city planning and investment. The report highlights the desire of policymakers and cultural leaders to increase the role of uniquely Afrocentric knowledge in cultural policy and identifies networks as key sources of learning.

Underlying these actions is recognition of the power of culture. “Leaders will need to meet challenges like rapid modernisation with a recognition for African identities and African histories,” concludes the report. Culture’s role in shaping individual and collective identities “fosters a sense of unity and belonging that transcends geographical and social boundaries,” it adds.

Cape Town is one of the destinations highlighted in the report. Part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, it is considered a thought leader for culture, incorporating cultural expression and creativity into the core of realising sustainable urban developments. The city is home to a range of arts, culture and heritage sites including the iconic V&A Waterfront that houses the Watershed craft and design space, Robben Island, the Artscape Theatre Centre, iZiko Museums and more.

Cultural institutions can reshape global dialogue

An increasing number of planners view culture and creativity as a lever for responding to global contemporary challenges, including health crises, environmental impacts and social tensions.

Sally Shaw argues that the visual arts have a crucial role to play in helping people collectively envision new possibilities. “Art galleries are the places where we can imagine many different futures from many different perspectives,” says Shaw. “It’s about coming together to imagine and communicate the future.”

Mike van Graan, meanwhile, highlights the power of theatre to challenge perceptions. He recently produced a satirical play about political engagement that played in theatres and festivals — “the traditional route”, he says. “But we’ve also taken it to retirement villages, into school halls, into faith institutions, even into people’s homes. We perform and then we have a discussion with the audience. Changing the world by changing people’s minds.”

Digital platforms foster new global connections

Digital technology is another creative channel that has huge potential to help diverse and authentic voices reach global audiences. It also has the power to put a cultural destination on the map.

One innovative approach is the use of advanced 3D modelling technology, such as that developed by US-based non-profit CyArk. Its digital models of heritage sites offer manifold benefits: they can reach new audiences remotely, allowing for immersive experiences without the need for a physical visit. This increases accessibility, allowing people who may be unable to visit sites physically to still engage in a cultural experience. Producing detailed data on historic sites also supports preservation, which is critical where sites may be threatened, whether by conflict or climate change.

CyArk’s platform allows audio and video to be embedded in digital models, opening up conversations about points of cultural significance. “We can share stories that are difficult to tell in person and provide multiple perspectives, which might not be possible when you’re on-site,” says Elizabeth Lee, CyArk’s vice president of programs and development. “If you visit, you’re not going to meet all of these community members and hear their stories, but you can do that in an online version.”

To that end, CyArk works with local communities to capture their stories, often training community members in photography, 3D capture, videography and storytelling. “It helps local communities to be active participants in the process,” says Lee.

Conclusion

Cultural master planners are putting investments in cultural and creative activity at the centre of development projects around the world. Here are five ways to make the most of these investments.

How to become a cultural powerhouse

1

Empower communities to interpret and share their culture

Involve communities in placemaking and empower them to define their history, traditions and priorities for cultural expression. Enable them to reinterpret their cultural heritage and shape how they share their identity with the world.

2

Adopt an integrated approach to culture and development initiatives

Cultural heritage and creativity play a central role in shaping our identity at a community and an individual level. Policymakers need to recognise the fundamental value of cultural and creative activity to lives well-lived, ensuring that investment is used to provide opportunities for everyday creativity that are accessible to everyone across the community.

3

Develop funding mechanisms to support creativity and culture

Globally, the creative and cultural sectors are a huge source of growth. Policymakers should develop innovative financing mechanisms that can unlock new sources of funding, such as low-interest loans where commercial lending is unavailable, grant funding or rent-free premises. Investment should be directed towards creative hubs that reflect community priorities and provide support for small initiatives and startups.

4

Build cultural partnerships to transform the brand

The creative and cultural sectors can help to transform a destination's reputation or 'brand', domestically and internationally, which can drive major economic benefits – including those generated by cultural tourism. Partnerships with established cultural institutions around the world can support increased interest among potential visitors, as well as create opportunities for cultural exchange and dialogue that enhance the cultural experience.

5

Leverage the power of digital technology

Embrace the power of technology to engage new audiences with culture. Use social media to reach new audiences and explore the potential for more sophisticated technology to provide remote-access cultural experiences, amplify diverse voices and create new opportunities for cultural exchange.

About the report

Thank you to our experts

This report was written by FT Longitude, the specialist thought leadership division of the Financial Times Group. It is based on the insights of seven experts who kindly shared their insights with us.

We would like to thank them for their time:



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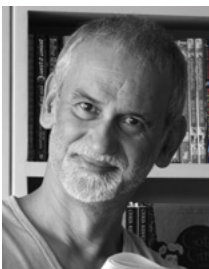
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About The Royal Commission for AIUla

The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) was established by royal decree in July 2017 to preserve and develop AIUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in north-west Saudi Arabia. RCU's long-term plan outlines a responsible, sustainable, and sensitive approach to urban and economic development that preserves the area's natural and historic heritage while establishing AIUla as a desirable location to live, work, and visit. This encompasses a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, tourism, culture, education, and the arts, reflecting a commitment to meeting the economic diversification, local community empowerment, and heritage preservation priorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 programme.

الهيئة الملكية لمحافظة العلاء
Royal Commission for AlUla

