During a brainstorming meeting at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Fagus-Werk in Alfeld, 35 participants from various European countries discussed the role of culture in non-urban places. Voices of Culture is the name of the EU programme that organised the event together with the German Goethe-Institut Brussels and brought it to Alfeld.

No less than 44.4% of the European population lives in cities. With the EU’s aim of achieving a more balanced territorial development, over recent years more attention has been paid to non-urban, rural and peri-urban areas. Non-urban areas in Europe need much more support than cities to create and develop structures for cultural activities. For this reason, the European Commission has initiated a structured dialogue with a selection of cultural actors in Europe on the role of culture in non-urban areas. The planned project is intended to show ways in which both policy and EU funding programmes can provide more targeted support for culture outside cities and have a positive influence on it.

Accordingly, the focus of the working groups was on the one hand on the question of cultural work in so-called “non-places”, i.e. in regions outside cities that cannot actually be defined as rural areas. On the other hand, they addressed the challenges that tourism in rural areas entails for culture - especially regarding the so-called “over tourism”. The third main theme tackled the effects of depopulation and ageing on culture.

The group also underlined the importance of simplifying the financing of EU procedures, providing seed capital for the testing of ideas and ensuring more transversal work in project implementation. Also crucial is to implement the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals in all actions and to take full account of the potential of digital progress - not only as a communication tool, but also in the production and implementation of cultural events and actions.

The 35 cultural managers know exactly what is important. They were selected for the meeting from 189 applicants from various working contexts. Thus, the group of participants consisted of networks operating throughout Europe, such as Culture Action Europe, actors from the cultural and creative industries, and stakeholders from organisations operating in non-urban areas. Representatives of former European Capitals of Culture Wrocław 2016, Aarhus 2017, Plovdiv 2019 and future European Capitals of Culture, such as Kaunas 2022 and Tampere 2026 strengthened the team at the brainstorming meeting in Alfeld.
Hildesheim was represented by Sabine Zimmermann from the Netzwerk Kultur & Heimat during the two English-language workshop days. She shared her experiences gained from the diverse socio-cultural project work in the Hildesheim region and the resulting challenges and needs on site. Zimmermann is also a member of the Hi2025 project team, as is the moderator of the brainstorming meeting, Else Christensen-Redzepovic, and supports the application process for European Capital of Culture 2025 for Hildesheim and the region. And she draws a positive conclusion: “The exchange and reflection of the current challenges for cultural work in rural areas was enormously important to all participants. The results worked out within the groups were in part surprisingly similar and thus confirmed their meaningfulness”.

Else Christensen-Redzepovic emphasizes, “During the two-day meeting it became very clear that there is an urgent need to develop a comprehensive cultural policy that goes beyond the city limits and includes areas outside the cities. Nothing illustrates more clearly than the Fagus-Werk itself that a culturally significant movement does not have to take place in the big city, but that this is also possible in the province”.

The results of the Alfeld Discussion will be summarised in a report with recommendations for political changes, laws and measures and will be presented and discussed by the 35 participants on 28 April in Brussels before representatives of the European Commission.

**Background:** Voices of Culture is a project of the European Commission. Its aim is to promote the role and place of culture and to improve communication between civil society actors and policy makers in the field of culture. Hereby, cultural operators are to be supported in communicating their interests at European level. [https://voicesofculture.eu](https://voicesofculture.eu)