

05/07/2026

Design as Systematic Transition in the Next EU Work Plan for Culture 2027+

Topic

**Design as Strategic Sector for European Competitiveness and Everyday
Democratic Citizen-Centred Public Value**

Rationale

Every cultural priority area includes a “design dimension” (systems, services, spaces, digital environments, governance). Design is both a world-class economic force and the cultural form every EU citizen encounters daily, irrespective of background, income or location. Europe's competitive advantage in design is inseparable from its humanist tradition — it is precisely this people-centred character that differentiates European design on global markets and makes it the Union's most universally accessible cultural instrument. This Work Plan proposes advancing both dimensions as a single, integrated strategic priority.

The European Commission's Report *Unleashing the potential of the cultural and creative industries (2025)* provides the foundational evidence on two complementary levels. Economically, design generates industry, knowledge and network spillovers of exceptional reach: some forty per cent of design employment operates outside the Cultural and Creative Sector itself (OECD, 2022), confirming design as a systemic driver of cross-sectoral innovation and competitiveness. The European Commission (2021) has identified the Cultural and Creative Industries, of which design constitutes a leading subsector, as one of fourteen industrial ecosystems vital to European industrial strategy. Strategic public investment, as demonstrated by Belgian fashion's trajectory from the Antwerp Six to global recognition, yields exponential returns when sustained (Hartung, 2025).

Civically, design shapes the social fabric of European societies through daily experience. Design for All — understood not as a narrow accessibility standard but as the commitment to serving every person with equal consideration — is both a democratic act and a competitive positioning (Kern, 2015). The quality of public spaces and services is a key determinant of social cohesion, influencing levels of inclusion and resilience to extremist narratives. What makes European design globally competitive is what makes it socially indispensable. This integrated understanding

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aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), the Commission's missions under President von der Leyen (European Commission, 2024), and the Davos Baukultur Declaration on high quality architecture as a foundation for cohesive societies (World Economic Forum, 2018).

Working Methods

Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group of experts; peer learning and voluntary exchange of national experience with thematic workshops, joint policy mapping in coordination with relevant Commission services, and practitioner testimony as well as collecting and evaluating best-practice examples of design processes and design objects as an inspiring data base for democratic design. During transectoral high-level governmental meetings under each Council presidency, a framework should be created to consolidate findings, such as on policy and economic transformation processes through design, for endorsement by political and governmental representatives responsible for culture across all twenty-seven Member States.

Target Outputs

The Working Group will target to develop a comparative mapping of national design policy frameworks identifying transferable best practices to inspire outcomes such as a policy-toolkit for ministries, a cross-sectoral evidence report on design spillovers into design-intensive industries; action-based policy recommendations calibrated to national contexts — explicitly rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach — addressing public procurement, design literacy in education, SME financing and design's role in countering social fragmentation; and a political declaration affirming design as a strategic sector for European competitiveness and as a democratic measure of quality of life for all citizens.

References and Further Readings

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