



Designing Futures

An International Program
on Cultural Leadership



Introduction

“Designing Futures” is an international leadership program for leaders in the cultural and creative industries. It is an international leadership program specifically developed for professionals and emerging leaders in the cultural and creative industries.

This program is a collaboration between Flanders and South Africa, fostering an exchange of knowledge and expertise. It was developed within the framework of the UNITWIN UNESCO Chair for Cultural Entrepreneurship and Cultural Policy, initiated by University of Antwerp and the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

The program addresses the growing need for leadership within the cultural and creative industries by providing essential strategic skills to navigate an evolving cultural landscape. Over twelve months, twenty participants—ten from South Africa and ten from Flanders—take part in six interconnected labs (five online and one seven-day residential module in South Africa). Participants test ideas, share dilemmas, and co-create solutions to pressing issues such as digital transformation, social innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainable business models and partnerships and inclusive governance. The labs guide them from deep personal reflection to organizational strategy and systemic design thinking, equipping them to lead change. Grounded in real-world case studies, cross-regional dialogue, and mentorship from experienced academics and sector practitioners, the program challenges participants to compare cultural practices in the Global North and Global South.

Graduates leave with a certificate, a sharpened leadership identity, an international peer network, and practical frameworks for embedding impact assessment within their organizations.



The Program Structure

The Labs

The foundation of the program consists of 6 labs (hybrid), referred to as labs (laboratories) because they serve not only as knowledge acquisition but also as platforms for sharing and creating knowledge. Structured to unfold over a 12-month period, five of these labs are conducted online, with one lab adopting a hybrid format, taking place in South Africa at the University of Witwatersrand.

Lab 1

The Cultural Ecosystem: Global and Local Challenges

15 - 16 oktober 2026

Schedule: Morning – Theoretical session / Afternoon – Practical exercises

This lab focuses on the global and local challenges for the cultural ecosystem in South-Africa and Flanders (Belgium). We will discuss the policy framework within the cultural sector in the different locations from a comparative perspective. Participants will explore each other ecosystem and examine how common, global challenges affect the creative and cultural sectors. The morning sessions present key theoretical frameworks and current trend analyses, while the afternoon is devoted to peer to peer discussions and identifying the global and local challenges for the cultural industries in both locations.

Lab 2

Cultural Leadership – Inside Out and Outside In

23 - 27 november 2026 / In-person at the University of Witwatersrand

We move from the external challenges to the personal leadership. This intensive lab centers on cultural leadership from dual perspectives. On the one hand, the 'inside out' approach focuses on personal identity, core values, and authenticity. Time is devoted to self reflection and leadership styles. On the other hand, the 'outside in' approach examines external influences, governance perspective and the leader's role in forging sustainable connections with diverse stakeholders. Through interactive exercises, in-depth discussions, and practical assignments, participants develop an integrated leadership vision that creates both internal and external impact.

Lab 3

Organisational Culture & Organisational Structure

3 - 4 februari 2027

This lab examines the interplay between organisational culture and structure. Participants delve into the core values that shape an organisation's identity and explore how an effective structure can foster innovation and collaboration. Time will also be spend to the more informal economy in South Africa and how artists and groups are organising themselves. Morning sessions provide insights into emerging and established models and methodologies, while in the afternoon attendees will apply these insights within their own labour situation and working environments. We always use a comparative approach: what can we learn from each other and from the different locations.

Lab 4

Business Modelling, Entrepreneurship, Creative Placemaking

15 - 16 april 2027

In today's evolving cultural landscape, organisations must embrace innovative strategies and sustainable business models. This lab explores entrepreneurial approaches within the cultural and creative sectors. What is the role of arts and culture for creative placemaking? And who is taking the leadership in these processes? Sessions alternate between theoretical insights and hands-on workshops, enabling participants to develop forward-thinking and future-proof concepts for their organisations

Lab 5

Collaboration Models and Political Skills

20 - 21 mei 2027

In a dynamic and rapidly changing environment, effective collaboration is key. This lab focuses on developing different types of collaboration models and enhancing political skills. Participants analyze and compare various approaches to connecting internal and external stakeholders, while learning how to strategically navigate policy-making and public decision processes. Practical exercises and group discussions are designed to sharpen participants' abilities to act as bridges and mediators. Also in this lab, attention will be given to different governance models and strategies to deal with politics and the notion of 'artistic autonomy'.

Lab 6

Inclusion, Participation and Digitalisation

24 - 25 juni 2027

This lab provides an in-depth exploration of how digitalisation is transforming the CCI, with a focus on participation and inclusion. Participants investigate innovative marketing concepts and methods to involve diverse target groups. Through interactive workshops and case studies, they learn how to use digital strategies to involve and expand their audiences.



Learning Tracks

Besides the 6 learning labs that are the basis of the program, there are three learning tracks that are developed throughout the program. These tracks serve as the cornerstone of our program, guiding participants on a transformative journey of leadership development and innovation. Each track plays a vital role in shaping the skills and capabilities of our participants, ultimately equipping them to excel as leaders in the cultural and creative sectors.

1 / Reflection

In this track, we offer coaching sessions and peer supervision. We focus on (further) developing the personal leadership skills and enhancing their sensitivity and understanding of the environment and collaboration with others. Working on reflection during the program helps in formulating their own learning objectives, identifying the learning objectives of their organisation and the cultural field as a whole, and processing and deepening the provided material.

This track encourages you to examine the role you play in the program (as an example of a leadership role), experiment with it, and learn from it. There will be two individual coaching sessions between the participant and a coach, which will delve deeper into their personal leadership questions. These sessions will take place at the beginning of the program and in the middle to further develop them throughout the labs. This Learning track is based on mentoring, involving an exchange of knowledge based on experience and peer-to-peer learning.

2 / Interventure

This learning track focuses on innovative action and creating meaningful connections with the environment. The Interventure assignment combines the concepts of innovation, intervention, and adventure. In the interventure, we challenge participants to genuinely apply their leadership, entrepreneurship, and investigative abilities. Key goals for the interventure track are stimulating innovative thinking, connecting with stakeholders from different sectors, and collaborating with peers and other cultural organisations.

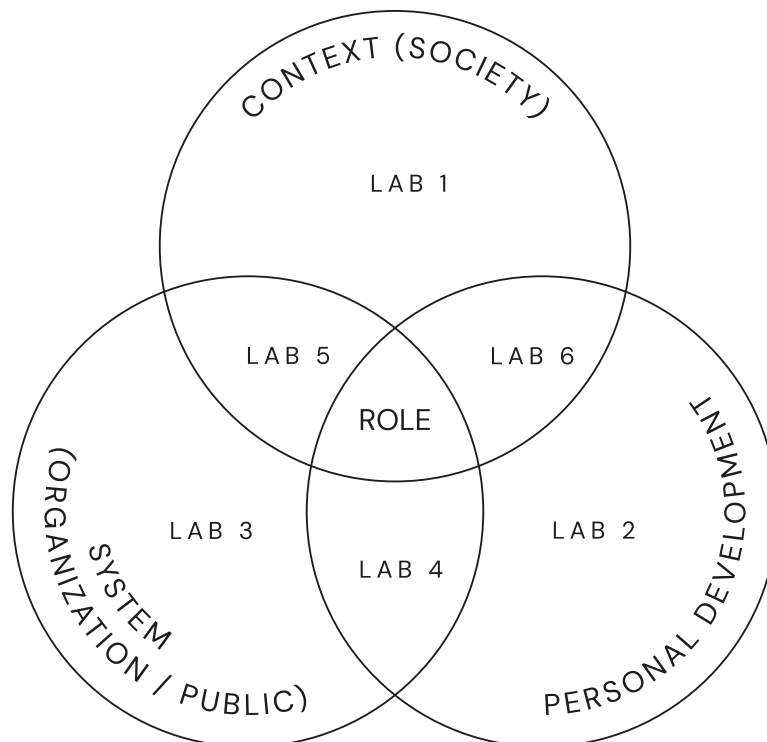
The core of the assignment is to collaborate in a team and to explore new ways of thinking (Systemic Design) resulting in a concrete and innovative idea or outcome that is relevant for the cultural sector and/or organisations. The cultural professionals and young potentials explore new practices or develop cross-sectoral connections in this track. Interventures provide participants with the opportunity to experiment with new leadership roles and entrepreneurship beyond their existing practices. Insights and models from the labs can also be tested here.

3 / Cultural Connections

Learning Track 3 is a part of the program that consists of inspiration cafés where cultural leaders meet leaders from other sectors, and have a discussion on specific themes and societal issues. We invite leaders from other societal domains for this purpose. They share their vision on leadership in their sector and engage in a dialogue with our cultural leaders.

During these gatherings, others are also invited, including alumni, friends, and ambassadors of the broader cultural sector. Cultural Connections are exactly what they imply: places to establish new connections with different people, perspectives, and sectors. These sessions will be held online with opportunities for debates and questions afterward.

The figure below provides a guiding concept and illustrates the emphasis in each lab. Throughout the program, the focus shifts to the leadership role at different levels: the systemic level (society), and how the leadership role is shaped in relation to their organisation and at a personal level.



Program Management



Prof. Dr. Annick Schramme

Prof. Annick Schramme is a leading academic in cultural management and policy, serving as a professor at the University of Antwerp where she directs the Master's program in Cultural Management and heads the Competence Center for Cultural Management & Policy. She has extensive expertise in cultural policy, governance, and creative industries, and has spearheaded initiatives that merge academic insight with practical leadership in the cultural sector. Prof. Schramme has held notable leadership roles, including chairing the European network for cultural management (ENCATC) from 2013 to 2017, and serving as chair of the Flemish government's Strategic Advisory Council for Culture, Youth, Sports and Media. Since 2020, she also contributes to European expert groups and is a member of the UNESCO Commission in Belgium, reflecting her standing as an authority in international cultural governance.



Dr. Caryn Abrahams

Dr. Caryn Abrahams is a senior lecturer and research director at the Wits School of Governance, University of the Witwatersrand. She holds a PhD from the University of Edinburgh and specializes in urban governance, development studies, and social inclusion within the African context. Before joining academia, Dr. Abrahams was a senior researcher at the Gauteng City-Region Observatory, where she focused on social cohesion, anti-racism initiatives, and urban development in South Africa. She has also been active in civil society and scholarly research on public policy, contributing to studies of urban food systems governance and efforts to foster non-racialism and nation-building in South Africa.



Avril Joffe

Avril Joffe is an economic sociologist and cultural policy expert who holds the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Entrepreneurship and Policy at the University of the Witwatersrand. With over thirty years of experience in the arts and cultural economy of Africa, she has played a key role in developing academic programs in cultural entrepreneurship, cultural leadership, and creative markets at Wits Universit. Joffe's expertise bridges academia and practice, extending to policy development, organizational management, and the evaluation of cultural and creative industry initiatives. She is recognized internationally through her roles in UNESCO's expert facility on cultural policy and governance and the UK's Global Creative Economy Council (Creative PEC), among other advisory positions, underscoring her influence on global cultural policy discourse.



Leonie Delaey

Leonie Delaey is a cultural entrepreneur practitioner. She serves as the education assistant for the Master of Cultural Management at the University of Antwerp and coordinates the "Leadership in Culture" of the LinC program at Antwerp Management School. Delaey also engages in international cultural management research. Her work centers on fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation in the cultural sector, reflecting her commitment to bridging theory and research in cultural management.



Practical Information

Locations

University of Witwatersrand, South Africa & University of Antwerp, Belgium

Program

15 - 16 October 2026	The Cultural Ecosystem: Global and Local Challenges
23 - 27 November 2026	Cultural Leadership: Inside Out and Outside In
3 - 4 February 2027	Organisational Culture & Organisational Structure
15 - 16 April 2027	Business Modelling, Entrepreneurship, Creative Placemaking
20 - 21 May 2027	Collaboration Models and Political Skills
24 - 25 June 2027	Inclusion, Participation and Digitalisation

From the UNESCO Chair

[UNESCO Chair in Cultural Entrepreneurship and Policy](#)

Through the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Entrepreneurship and Policy, 10 cultural leaders from Flanders and 10 young cultural leaders from South Africa will be given the opportunity to participate in this program.

Within this international training program, 20 cultural professionals and emerging talents (10 from Flanders and 10 from South Africa) will be selected, fostering a diverse and dynamic exchange between these regions. The program is specifically designed for cultural leaders and young potentials in the cultural and creative sectors, including the arts, creative industries, film and media sectors, archives and libraries, performing arts, and heritage. It aims to support those who aspire to contribute to the sector's sustainable growth, social cohesion, and health by utilising their leadership skills and creative thinking.

The participation fee for the year-long program is 2,000 euros, which includes the flight and accommodation in South Africa. Candidates must submit their application via the form on our website before June 30 2026.

If you have any questions, please contact Leonie Delaey at Leonie.Delaey@uantwerpen.be.