



**Strategy of Danish Cultural Institute  
2025–2028**

## SUMMARY

The strategy for 2025-2028 reinforces the strategic direction that Danish Cultural Institute (DCI) initiated in 2018. At that time, we decided to pursue three main areas: **1.** To become more relevant by creating 'culture on the edge,' meaning strategically placing our activities where there were foreign policy implications for Denmark, making cultural and international relationship-building particularly important. **2.** To increase our visibility, especially in Denmark, by communicating more clearly about our activities through the media and participation in public events. Finally, **3.** To establish a balanced economy by supplementing our operational scope through leading and engaging in large, long-term externally funded programmes.

All three objectives have been successfully achieved. As a result, DCI now has a clearer profile, greater visibility, and a balanced economy.

In the upcoming strategic period from 2025 to 2028, we will build on this positive development by:

- Further **sharpening our profile and relevance** by setting strategic goals for all our initiatives, ensuring maximum impact from DCI's resources and priorities, and exploring new geopolitically significant locations, currently in Africa.
- **Strengthening our visibility** by expanding our Danish network with partners and donors and creating strategic partnerships that provide us with a larger platform for visibility.
- Creating a **robust economy** that is both solid enough to manage the risks associated with large programmes and allows space for testing new initiatives and growth opportunities.

These three areas will be complemented by two additional focuses.

We will:

- Become an even more **prominent advocate for the importance of culture in Denmark's international relations** by incorporating relevant knowledge and research, and by documenting and communicating our results.
- Continue to build a **professional project management organisation** capable of handling large, complex international programmes, thereby serving as an inspiration for other Danish cultural institutions.

## INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL EXCHANGE STRENGTHENS MUTUAL TRUST, DIALOGUE, AND DENMARK'S CULTURAL RELATIONS

DCI was founded with the purpose of engaging with foreign countries to enlighten them about Denmark's culture, art, and societal life, as well as to promote knowledge of foreign cultures in Denmark. The mission was and remains to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen Denmark's international relations through cultural exchange.

In recent years, DCI has sharpened its profile and focused on creating 'culture on the edge,' both in terms of content and geography. This sharpened profile has resulted in new large externally funded programmes and enabled DCI to manage complex projects with many partners in conflict-affected contexts to a far greater extent than before. We will carry these experiences forward in the continued development of DCI.

We look forward to using this strategy to continue the important work of strengthening international cultural exchange and Denmark's international cultural relations. As the world has evolved, DCI's mission remains just as relevant as it was in 1940 when we were established.

## **ABOUT THE STRATEGY**

This strategy is built on the experiences gained from DCI's 85 years of operation, as well as discussions with stakeholders, partners, and the many dedicated employees at DCI who contribute daily to making it a vibrant, productive, and dynamic organisation. DCI's continued relevance requires us to continually engage with the world around us, which influences our cultural initiatives and international exchange.

We believe in the potential of culture to create strong international relationships. The aim of our work is to enhance mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, fostering greater trust and dialogue. This goal aligns with DCI's original purpose, as articulated by its founder Folmer Visti and a group of significant Danes in the fields of art, culture, science, and society. DCI was established in 1940 as a response to war and the authoritarian trends that characterised Europe at that time. The institute played an active role in the artistic and socio-cultural reconstruction efforts of the post-war period, and we continue to build on this proud tradition.

Today, we face new international challenges, fragmentation, and tensions between cultures, countries, and governance systems, while multinational cooperation within the UN is under strain. At the same time, the need for intercultural collaboration and mutual understanding is growing across all parts of our globalised world, as many of the greatest societal challenges cannot be solved by individual countries alone.

Denmark has much to offer in the artistic and cultural fields. Drawing on strong Danish traditions of dialogue and participation, the institute has promoted projects from the outset that demonstrate how art and culture, in conjunction with other sectors, can foster cooperation across borders and enhance intercultural dialogue.

With a turnover exceeding 100 million DKK over the past two years, renewed political relevance through our strong presence in the Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, and significantly increased visibility both nationally and internationally, DCI is operating at a new level.

While the previous strategic period was characterised by adapting to our own growth and gaining experience in implementing a sharpened profile, we will take the next steps in the upcoming strategic period to consolidate and expand the three strategic areas we have already established, namely:

- Sharpening our profile and relevance
- Increasing our visibility
- Ensuring a robust economy

Additionally, we will:

- Increase our advocacy for the importance of culture in Denmark's international relations.
- Continue developing a professional project organisation.

This requires us to focus on developing DCI's core competencies and core products, strengthening our cultural diplomatic tools and organisational learning, and enhancing our ability to document our transformative results while creating visibility around these efforts locally and in Denmark.

The strategy must remain dynamic and adaptable to changes in the world. The board will continually evaluate the strategy to ensure that DCI's priorities and initiatives align with the shifting realities in which we operate.

## **THE STRATEGY'S FOUNDATION**

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 triggered the largest man-made security and humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The era of globalisation, characterised by a rules-based international community centred around a single superpower and strong global and regional institutions, is over. We are entering a world with a more fluid international system marked by shifting patterns of cooperation and potential proxy conflicts between great powers. Greater unpredictability will become a pervasive condition, with power distributed among more actors. Technological leaps are creating new opportunities and risks that will need to be addressed through global agreements. The same applies to the management of global climate change, which requires fundamental rethinking, including from a cultural perspective, as well as shared agreements and strategies. Denmark is one of the most globalised countries in the world and is therefore deeply reliant on navigating the geopolitical and economic landscape. At the same time, the resurgence of power balance thinking, spheres of influence, and geopolitics challenges the multilateral and rules-based cooperation that safeguards the operational space for smaller states.

In countries outside the EU, there is often no consensus on the universal application of our values. Differences in cultural values, ways of life, and customs can pose significant barriers to international cooperation and development. However, art and culture can also reveal new pathways for creative innovation and promote the exchange of values rooted in diversity and equality. The exchange of art and culture across borders provides us with insights and perspectives, as well as opportunities for self-reflection when encountering the art and culture of other countries, thereby broadening our understanding of the nuances and elements of our own national identity. In this way, art and culture are much greater than ourselves as individuals. At their best, art and culture can foster cultural citizenship and strong communities across national, social, and ethnic divides.

However, cultural and arts policy is also part of the strategy of autocrats to maintain control and power over their populations. In autocracies, there is stricter control over cultural institutions, with the aim of redefining national identities. Art emerges despite the political system and can become a space for self-preservation, a way to keep the door open and maintain personal integrity and freedom in a totalitarian state.

In the Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, arts, and cultural policy has become a central dimension in the post-Soviet states' struggle for self-determination and self-creation. This was evident in the 1990s in the Baltic countries, where DCI played a significant role in building their new identities and cultures. Art and culture also play a key role in the war in Ukraine, where culture is part of a national security or offensive strategy. Russia uses art and culture to justify its war of aggression in Ukraine. Conversely, artists and cultural figures become defenders of Ukrainian identity. In the other Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, art and culture are pivotal in the young people's aspirations for freedom and their dreams for a more open and democratic future.

Globally, there is also a struggle for hearts and minds, and cultural diplomacy, along with the concept of soft power, plays a crucial role. The hegemony of the West is being challenged both internally and externally by forces that do not adhere to democratic principles and liberal ideals of freedom.

Denmark's international cultural policy encompasses cultural exports, nation branding, the promotion of the arts, and relationship-building. For DCI, it is particularly the latter that we see as our mission and core competencies. We focus on areas where Danish interests in relationships are significant but where the context is complex.

During the last strategic period from 2018 to 2024, we have more than tripled our budget and are deeply engaged in civil society-promoting programmes in the cultural sector. With Danida and the EU as primary contributors, we have expanded our presence in the near region, in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, and around the Baltic Sea. This has placed a number of demands on DCI as an organisation. We have strengthened our capacity and competencies in financial management, administration, and project management, bringing in a range of new skills.

Russia's war has meant that we had to close our office in St. Petersburg, but in return, our efforts in Ukraine and towards the Belarusian arts and cultural scene have been massively expanded, including a youth house in Kyiv and a youth hub in Mykolaiv, a significant support programme for the free Belarusian arts and culture, and we have established a new permanent presence in Lithuania, Moldova, and Georgia, with activities in the Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

DCI now consists of two regional branches covering the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, along with four country branches for China, India, Türkiye, and Brazil. We have a permanent presence in Riga, Vilnius, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, Chisinau, Tbilisi, Beijing, and São Paulo, and as of 2024, we are active in 18 countries.

## **VISION**

To strengthen Denmark's international cultural relations for the benefit of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, trust, and dialogue.

## **MISSION**

DCI was established with the aim of communicating Denmark's culture, arts, and societal life abroad, while also fostering knowledge of foreign cultures in Denmark. In doing so, DCI seeks to contribute to mutual understanding between nations and strengthen Denmark's international cultural relations.

## **APPROACH**

We collaborate internationally with Danish and local partners on cultural projects that are grounded in cultural rights, and promotes artistic expression, democratic dialogue, youth engagement, and sustainability.

## **PRINCIPLES**

Our work is based on the following principles:

- In equal partnerships
- With mutual respect
- Knowledge-based
- Human rights-based
- Through arts and culture

## **GOALS**

The strategy has five overarching goals that will guide DCI's work during the strategic period:

- 1. We will sharpen our profile and relevance** by setting strategic goals for all our initiatives, ensuring the most effective use of DCI's resources and priorities, and exploring new geopolitically relevant locations, currently in Africa.

DCI has gained significant impact and relevance by playing an active and coordinating role in the renewed interest in building strong relations with neighbouring countries to the east and strengthening free civil societies through art and cultural exchanges, as well as democracy-promoting initiatives, particularly targeting young people. In this context, DCI has developed a regional strategy for the Eastern Neighbourhood Countries. For the upcoming period, this will be complemented by a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region/Baltic States and the Global South, with the aim of setting clear goals, ambitions, and success criteria for DCI's presence in these regions. New initiatives are currently being prepared on the African continent, as relations with Africa are considered crucial in the new geopolitical landscape, and a presence there is expected to create visibility, relevance, and promising growth opportunities.

- 2. We will enhance our visibility** by expanding our Danish network of partners and donors and establishing strategic partnerships that provide us with a broader platform for visibility.

Despite many initiatives and our long history, DCI remains relatively unknown in Denmark. One way to increase visibility, in addition to existing communication efforts, could be through more systematic network-building with industry organisations and other strong platforms in Danish cultural life, as well as by entering strategic partnerships with our international sister institutions to broaden the reach and impact of our projects.

- 3. We aim to create a robust economy** that is both solid enough to manage the risks associated with large programmes and flexible enough to allow for testing new initiatives and growth opportunities.

Overall, DCI's operating finances must be balanced, with equity ensuring the necessary solidity and liquidity to manage risks when handling large projects in unstable contexts. At the same time, sufficient free investment opportunities must be available so that new possibilities can be tested on a smaller scale to ensure DCI's continued agility and progress. Local presence must be defined conceptually and budgeted accordingly to achieve results and have the capacity to explore growth opportunities.

- 4. We will strengthen our advocacy for the importance of art and culture in Denmark's international relations** by incorporating relevant knowledge and research, documenting and communicating our results.

We will incorporate relevant knowledge and research and systematically document and communicate our results, share experiences across institutes and programmes, and with our international partners. Additionally, we will focus on exploring the relationship between art, culture, and cultural change and develop methods for how DCI can best work with these elements.

- 5. We will continue to develop a professional project management organisation** capable of handling large, complex international programmes, thereby serving as an inspiration to other Danish cultural institutions.

DCI has continued its efforts to streamline the organisation. We need to further incorporate tools from the project management field, including developing a theory of change for each DCI programme and working strategically with local anchoring.

Results and the value of DCI's efforts must be documented, further supporting DCI's Theory of Change.

In recent years, DCI has achieved significant growth by becoming the lead organisation for major DANIDA and EU programmes. These large, complex projects in challenging contexts have required the building of stronger capacity and the acquisition of new skills. These new project management skills must now be consolidated and implemented, ensuring a high level of familiarity with the new project management and evaluation systems across the organisation.

## **APPROACHES**

### **DCI's Geographical Focus**

In the upcoming strategic period, we will define our ambitions, objectives, success criteria, and priorities within our regional focus areas, which can currently be summarised as:

- The Eastern Neighbourhood Countries
- The Baltic States and the Baltic Sea Region
- The Global South

The aim is to set strategic goals and success criteria for all our geographical focus areas, ensuring the most effective use of DCI's resources and priorities in creating opportunities for growth, visibility, relevance, and a sustainable economy that includes sufficient resources to support these initiatives.

Due to geopolitical developments and the significant national, European, and international interest in Africa, we are currently exploring initiatives in Africa. Wherever possible, all DCI's initiatives will be complemented by joint Nordic and European efforts.

### **DCI's activities**

DCI engages in arts and cultural projects with the potential to drive social change. This means DCI's projects often extend beyond the traditional arts and include initiatives focused on youth engagement, education, democracy building, urban development, creative industries, new technologies, and sustainable transformation, among others.

The overall mission and vision of DCI, along with local interests and contextual conditions, will guide the selection of projects and thematic focus areas.

DCI has extensive experience in projects for children and young people and has, in recent years, developed considerable expertise in youth-led initiatives. DCI will continue to build on and expand this experience, potentially through establishing more youth houses or similar formats, if relevant in the local context.

### **DCI's national and international networks**

Over the years, DCI has established strong ties with people and organisations working with artistic and cultural exchange, civil society building, sustainable development, and democracy.

DCI's projects and activities are built in partnership with Danish and local cultural institutions and actors, authorities and civil society organisations. This creates anchoring and broadens the engagement in the projects, both locally and nationally.

In Denmark, DCI works with a large network of other cultural actors and civil society organisations and individual actors. This network is continuously developed and renewed, so that DCI has a broad Danish mandate to base its international work on.

Internationally, DCI often spreads its efforts by participating in European and Nordic initiatives.

DCI was among the six original founders of the network EUNIC – (EU National Institutes for Culture) in 2006 and has held the presidency several times, most recently in 2023/2024. EUNIC includes all 27 EU member states, the UK, and Ukraine. The network is an official partner of the EU, i.e. an invited contributor to the EU's international cultural strategy and initiatives. The network is organised in 140 clusters worldwide and covers all continents. Wherever DCI works, we are part of EUNIC's local network. This expands DCI's breadth and anchoring around the world.

Nordic co-operation has been more ad hoc, but the potential for more strategic collaboration should be explored, as there are many cultural common denominators and common interests.

Finally, it should be mentioned that DCI's international cultural initiatives are supplemented by the Danish Lecturer Scheme and the other Danish institutes abroad. The other Danish institutes primarily focus on archaeology, research, and study visits (Athens, Rome, Damascus), while the two Danish institutes in Cairo and Ramallah are framed by the Arab Initiative under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. DCI will continue the good cooperation with the Danish Lecturer Scheme and the other Danish institutes abroad to continuously explore possible areas of cooperation and ensure an optimal division of labour and coordination.

### **ABOUT DANISH CULTURAL INSTITUTE**

**Danish Cultural Institute** is a self-governing organisation. Its highest authority is the Council, consisting of up to 60 members representing political parties and other cultural institutions involved in international people-to-people cooperation and cultural exchange. The institute's activities are overseen by a Board, which sets the strategic direction. The Board appoints a CEO, who is responsible for the daily management of Danish Cultural Institute, both nationally and internationally.

The institute has existed since 1940, founded by a significant group of Danes from the fields of art, culture, science, and society, initiated by Folmer Wisti under the name *Det Danske Selskab* (The Danish Society). The Society aimed to foster mutual understanding by disseminating information about Denmark and promoting cultural exchange, ideas, and experiences across borders. In 1989, *Det Danske Selskab* changed its name to *Det Danske Kulturinstitut* (The Danish Cultural Institute), and in 2016, it became *Danish Cultural Institute*.

The first international branches were established in 1947 in the UK, the USA, and Central Europe, in the aftermath of World War II. Today, the Danish Cultural Institute has its headquarters in Copenhagen and operates in 18 countries through six branches. Its initiatives are grouped into three geographical regions: the Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, the Baltic States and Baltic Sea Region, and the Global South. DCI has eight



permanent locations abroad: Riga, Vilnius, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, Tbilisi, Chisinau, São Paulo, and Beijing.

For more than 80 years, the mission has been to promote intercultural dialogue across borders through arts and cultural projects, and this remains the focus today. The core idea of DCI is that, through a locally rooted presence in art and culture, we contribute to building Denmark's international relations through global cultural exchange.

## **ABOUT CULTURAL RIGHTS**

Culture is central to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

The following articles highlight this:

### **Article 1.**

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

### **Article 18.**

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes the freedom to change one's religion or belief and the freedom, either alone or in community with others, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

### **Article 19.**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

### **Article 22.**

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to the realisation, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organisation and resources of each State, of the economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable for their dignity and the free development of their personality.

### **Article 27.**

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary, or artistic creation which he or she has created

