



Executive Report

February 2026



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1 Introduction

Circular Culture is a British Council fund supporting the development of sustainable festivals. Established in 2021, the programme operates across the cultural sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (LATAC), providing grants and sustainability training to cultural festivals. By 2024, the programme has engaged 109 festivals across 10 countries and receives over 1,000 applications annually, reflecting its growing reach and relevance in the region.

Since its pilot year in 2021, there has been a consistent rise in the number of cultural festivals applying to participate in Circular Culture. Alongside this growth, the programme has expanded geographically, increasing its presence across LATAC countries. While music and film festivals remain the most represented, there has been a growing diversification towards visual arts, literature, dance and digital arts.

Festivals have a range of motivations for participating in Circular Culture, with the two primary drivers being the need for financial support and the opportunity to collaborate with UK artists. Given the close interrelation of these motivations—since grants are specifically designed to facilitate creative partnerships with the UK—this highlights the value participants place on this strand of the programme.

Additionally, Circular Culture has had a significant impact on participants' understanding of sustainability, with the majority reporting increased knowledge of sustainable practices as a result of their involvement in the programme.

2

Circular Culture purpose and strategy

This initiative was created as a response to an urgent need: approach sustainability through cultural practices. In fact, one of the strengths of the project resides in its flexible structure, which makes it respectful of each country and event's singularities.

Circular Culture acknowledges that sustainability extends beyond recycling, as it involves new knowledge, collaboration and networks that change the system.



3

Growing interest in Circular Culture

Interest in the Circular Culture Programme has grown due to increasing global awareness of climate change and the push for sustainable practices. Cultural institutions and festivals across the Americas are increasingly involved, seeking ways to reduce their environmental impact and align their efforts with internal climate goals.

During its pilot year, the programme received approximately 200 applications. Since then, as it has become fully operational, it has gained traction across the LATAC region. There has been increased awareness through targeted marketing and outreach efforts, which have contributed to a noticeable increase in the number of applications.

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Motivations to join Circular Culture

Our research indicates that the Circular Culture's programme grant is a vital source of funding, making it the joint primary reason for participation given by the region's limited resources, alongside the motivation to collaborate with UK artists, where festivals had the opportunity to learn UK values and standards.

Additionally, participants were motivated to develop sustainability skills and enhance their understanding of sustainability for their festivals.

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Participating in Circular Culture

So far, 109 festivals across the Americas have participated in Circular Culture. While music and film festivals continue to dominate, there has been a notable increase in the diversity of art forms represented in more recent cycles. Theatre was prominent in 2021 and 2022 but has since declined, whereas film has grown steadily, reaching its highest representation in 2024. Festivals with emerging art forms such as urban art, photography, and video have also gained traction, reflecting a shift towards more contemporary and diverse expressions. This variety has enabled the British Council to support sustainability across both traditional and evolving artistic disciplines.

6 | Some of the participating festivals

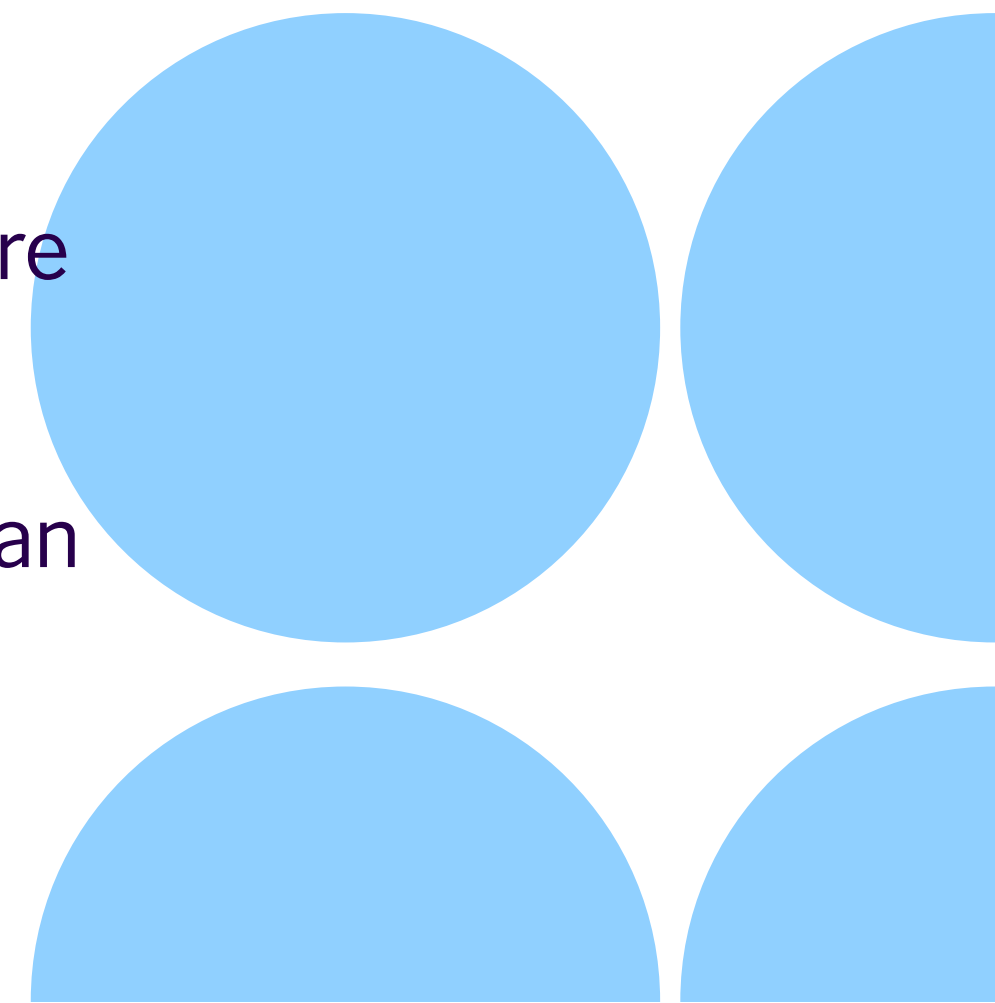
Festivals	Country	Place	Type
Festival Afrodescendencias	Mexico	Oaxaca, Guerrero	Multidisciplinary
Festival Disonarte	Colombia	Ibague	Music
Festival Ecomanigua	Cuba	Habana	Visual Arts
Ranchar	Argentina	Buenos Aires	Music
Barulhinho Delas	Brazil	Fortaleza	Multidisciplinary
1º Festival Mar, Conciencia y Soundsystem	Peru	Lima	Music
COCO Dance	Trinidad and Tobago	Port of Spain	Dance
Festival Ascenso	Venezuela	Caracas	Photography and video



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Festival Afrodescendencias: sustainability and sense of community

Mexico is the setting for another relevant example, the Festival Afrodescendencias, that celebrates the African cultural heritage of Afro-Mexican people. In 2024, the festival participated in Circular Culture for the first time and managed to carry out an artistic residency with Kyazi Lugangura, a Tanzanian musician based in the UK.



Kyazi's presence meant a transformative period; for the first time, artists and local audiences interacted directly with a person from Africa. This helped build insights about identity, racism, sense of belonging and collective creation.

The organizing team faced a complex context: the festival was held in a community that was going through one of the worst droughts of its history. **In fact, the common practices of re-using tableware weren't possible.**

Thanks to the guidance provided by Circular Culture, they adapted their methods and opted for recyclable plates made of cardboard and biodegradable cups, made from wheat, a solution that is respectful of the environment and sensible to the local reality.

Afrodescendencias is a small festival, with a reduced team and without private funding. However, despite its limitations, it has demonstrated being able to integrate sustainability and identity.

Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

In 2024, Afrodescendencias participated in Circular Culture for the first time, receiving invaluable support that significantly enriched the festival's programme. It is a festival deeply rooted in local community participation, specifically designed to celebrate and showcase Afro-descendant cultures in towns across Mexico.

The guest artist was Kyazi Lugangura, who resides in the United Kingdom and brought several significant benefits to the festival:

An African Connection: This was the first time an African artist participated in the festival, allowing Afro-descendant communities in Mexico to connect with someone from the continent. According to Claudia Lora Krstulovic, the festival's founder and director, "The communities, although they know they descend from Africans, had never met anyone from the continent."



Engagement with Local Musicians and Students: Kyazi performed three concerts and conducted three workshops focused on music students, particularly guitar students. He discussed the diversity of African rhythms, the importance of blending different styles and instruments, and the role of improvisation in music. His workshops also touched on issues of Afro-descendancy and racism in the United Kingdom, providing valuable cultural insights.

Breaking Stereotypes: Kyazi's performances challenged local expectations. As Claudia noted, "People expected an African artist to play drums or some percussion instrument. But he plays guitar, with calmer rhythms, similar to Bossa Nova." This broke down stereotypes and introduced audiences to contemporary African music beyond the traditional forms they might have expected.



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Disonarte Ibague, Colombia

Disonarte is a two-day music event in Ibague - known as the 'Musical Capital of Colombia', that highlights a rich diversity of musical genres, featuring both local and national artists, with occasional international performances. Held at the historic Museo Panóptico de Ibague, a 19th-century prison turned cultural centre, the festival provides a platform for various musical styles, including Colombian folklore, rap, salsa, and rock, across two stages. With 13 to 14 performances each day, Disonarte not only celebrates music but also facilitates discussions on the music industry and hosts a business roundtable to support local entrepreneurs, who participate in the food court at no cost.

Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

In 2023, Disonarte participated in Circular Culture for the first time. This prompted the organizers to consider sustainability measures for the first time in the festival's history. Before this, environmental concerns had not been prioritized in any of the city's numerous festivals. The team engaged in online training sessions on sustainability while the grant supported an artistic residency, which brought British DJ and percussionist Obeka to Ibague.

Colombia-Chile-Bermuda-UK: A Global Musical Exchange

Obeka, a DJ and percussionist from Bermuda based in Manchester, UK, performed on the festival's main stage and collaborated with artists from Ibague and Chile to co-write a song. His participation extended beyond performance; he engaged in workshops, labs with local musicians, and discussions on the music market. While sustainability was not the primary focus of his involvement, Obeka touched on environmental topics during these interactions.



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Ecomanigua La Habana, Cuba

The Ecomanigua Festival is a platform for arts and children's education while promoting sustainable practices to protect the environment. The festival was founded in 2024 by the directors of La Manigua Creativa, a cultural and educational institution, as part of their participation in the British Council's Circular Culture initiative.

Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

The festival was divided into two main parts. The first consisted of a workshop for educators from 30 Cuban institutions, jointly organized by La Manigua Creativa and Doorstep Arts, a UK-based nonprofit organization dedicated to arts education and headquartered in Torbay, England. The workshop focused on using theatre as a tool to explore environmental sustainability with children and young people.

The second part of the festival was a public event that included arts workshops, theatrical performances, sustainability talks, and a presentation by local singer Liuba María Hevia.

A Fraternal Partnership with Doorstep Arts

Doorstep Arts, a nonprofit creative education company from Torbay, England, played a crucial role in the success of Ecomanigua. The organization advocates for the integration of art in advancing social justice, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that every child's voice is heard. La Manigua Creativa invited Doorstep Arts to collaborate on using theatre to promote sustainable practices among Cuban children and youth. Mair George and Jade Campbell, seasoned actors and educators from Doorstep Arts, conducted workshops that left a lasting impression on the participants.

Upon returning to England, Mair and Jade reflected positively on their experience, sharing their admiration for the creative community projects in Cuba aimed at improving living conditions.



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Ranchar Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ranchar is a biannual free street festival described as an “open urban culture festival.” The event transforms a public street into a lively space from 4 PM until midnight, featuring street food, craft drinks, tattoo artists, and independent clothing designers. Live performances by DJs, bands, and musicians add vibrancy to the atmosphere. According to Mailén de la María, Ranchar’s general producer and music coordinator, ***Freedom is what defines the festival.***



RANCHEAR



Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

In May 2024, Ranchar was selected to participate in Circular Culture, a partnership that allowed them to invite a UK artist to collaborate with an Argentinian musician, adding a new element to the festival's offer.

Ranchar's participation in the programme marked its first involvement with the British Council. Through the programme's financial support, Ranchar's producers invited Joash, a musician based in Manchester, to collaborate with Argentinian musician María del Rosario Cassaro, known as Pastelita. The festival opened a call for local musicians interested in working with Joash, receiving over 100 submissions from artists across the country. Joash selected Pastelita, and the two musicians engaged in several Zoom meetings in the months leading up to the festival, creating a unique musical blend.



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Barulhinho Delas Fortaleza, Brazil

Barulhinho Delas is a music festival centred around the involvement and empowerment of women, including cisgender, transgender, indigenous, elderly women, and women with disabilities. The name "Barulhinho Delas," which translates to "Girls' Little Noise," reflects the festival's commitment to amplifying female voices and talents in every aspect of its operations. From its inception, the festival aimed to showcase performances by women-led bands, but it soon expanded its mission to ensure that women occupy roles in all facets of the festival, from stage setup to security. This inclusive approach extended to various demographics, including indigenous women and women with disabilities, further reinforcing the festival's dedication to diversity and representation.

Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

Barulhinho Delas has been involved in the programme since 2023. They engaged in both training sessions offering festival organizers valuable learning experiences and artistic residencies, bringing British artists to Fortaleza and offering festival organizers valuable learning experiences.

In 2023, artisan and activist Carrie Reichardt conducted a workshop on ceramics and memory, focusing on the role of women in preserving intangible cultural heritage. In 2024, activist artists Beccy McCray and Hannah Dave engaged with local women to explore the intersections of art, activism, and climate change.

These artistic residencies had a lasting impact on the local artists, encouraging them to rethink their creative processes and the materials they used. Festival organizer Nádia de Sousa emphasized the effects of these interactions, noting that the exchange of ideas with British artists led to a re-evaluation of daily practices among local participants.

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1º Festival Mar, Conciencia y Soundsystem Lima, Peru

The Mar, Conciencia y Soundsystem festival, co-founded by music producers Adrián Leon (of Matraca collectives) and José Henrique Choque (of Lima Dub Club), was established as an innovative event that fused their passion for soundsystem music with environmental conservation.

The festival brings together a vibrant mix of music, culture, and environmental advocacy. In 2023, attendees were treated to 10 hours

of diverse musical performances, vegan food offerings, and interactive stands hosted by environmental organizations such as Oceana, Conservamos, and Héroes del Planeta. These organizations shared critical insights into their efforts to protect marine life and engaged the public in discussions about how they could contribute to these initiatives.

Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

Mar, Conciencia y Soundsystem's participation in Circular Culture marked a significant milestone for the festival. This was their first involvement in the programme, and they were subsequently selected for the 2024 edition as well.

A key takeaway for the festival organizers was the reassurance gained from the training sessions. Adrián Leon noted that these sessions helped him realize that the challenges faced in producing Mar, Conciencia y Soundsystem were not unique but were shared by many other festivals across Latin America. This sense of commonality provided a calming effect, helping the organizers to navigate the complexities of festival production with greater confidence.



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COCO Dance Festival Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

The COCO Dance Festival is the largest and longest-running contemporary dance festival in the English-speaking Caribbean. It offers a professional platform for performance and experimentation, supporting young choreographers and dancers with mentorship, workshops, and community outreach. The festival features works by leading local choreographers and partners with regional and international artists, showcasing talent from over ten countries, including Barbados and Latvia.

COCO is dedicated to making dance accessible to children and young people, nurturing emerging talent through various programmes and initiatives. Its mission is to enrich the dance community by inspiring and encouraging creativity and collaboration.

Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

In 2023, the COCO Dance Festival participated in Circular Culture for the first time. The decision to apply was motivated by a peer recommendation and a connection with British-Trinidadian artist Bryony Bengé-Abbott, whose focus on environmental themes aligned with the festival's interest in exploring these topics through dance.

Additionally, COCO faced internal funding challenges due to the underdeveloped ecosystem for cultural event funding in Trinidad and Tobago. Unlike events aligned with corporate social responsibility initiatives, dance festivals like COCO Dance often struggle to secure financial support, making external

funding sources like Circular Culture especially valuable.

The festival's collaboration with Bryony Bengé-Abbott led to the screening of her experimental dance film, *The Colour of Transformation*, on the first night of the festival. This was followed by a collaboration with Trinidad and Tobago visual artist Akuzuru. Together, they performed a piece titled *AlkHemy Of Sound* (Planting DIRT) on the steps of the theatre, responding to the themes explored in Bengé-Abbott's film. This collaboration highlighted the importance of the natural environment and the role of Global Majority women in conservation efforts.

The collaboration with international artists and the British Council significantly enhanced the festival's international profile, bolstering its credibility and future prospects for international funding.



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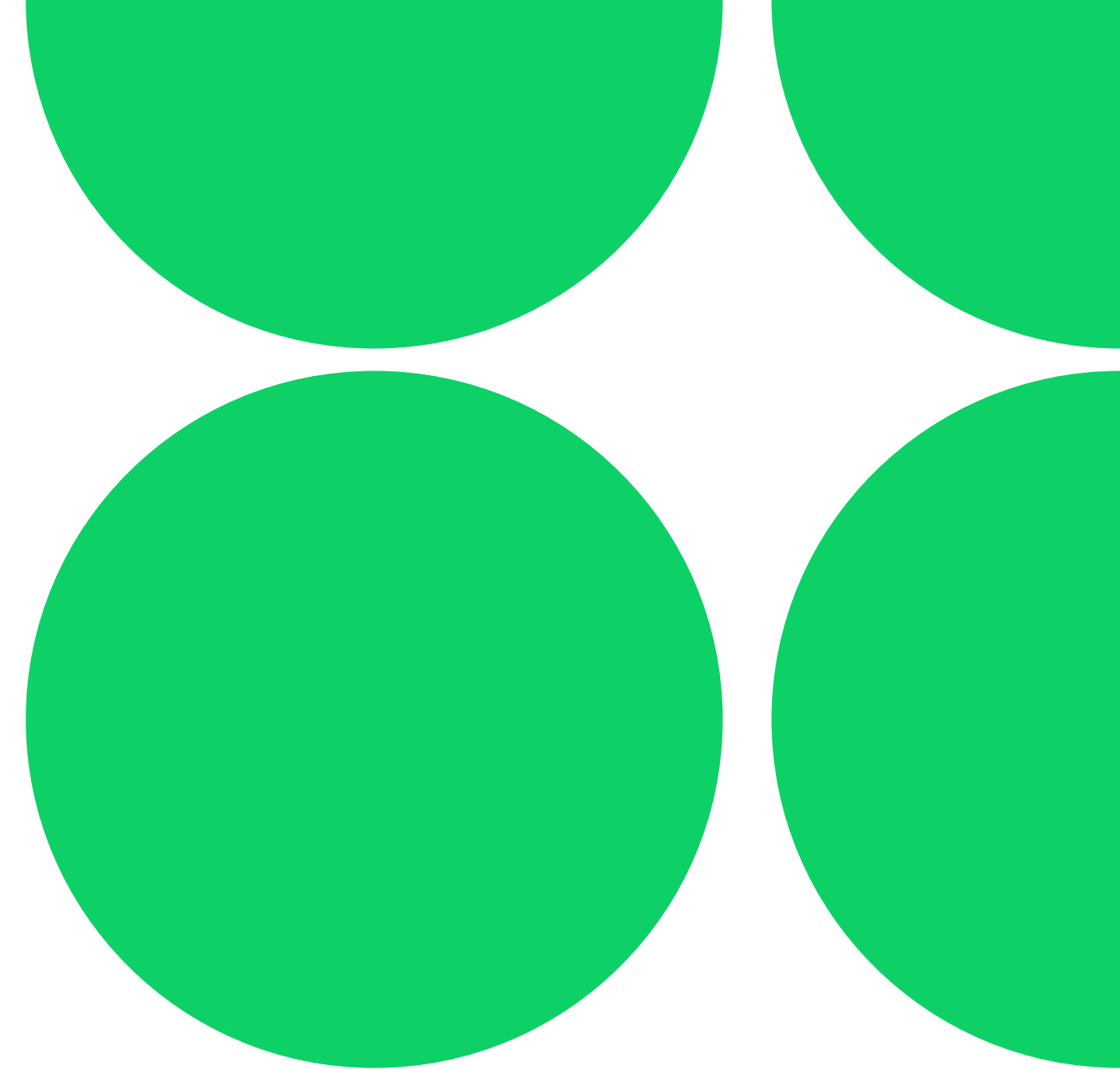


Festival Ascenso Caracas, Venezuela

Founded in October 2004, the Ascenso Festival is a prominent gathering for outdoor sports enthusiasts, including climbers, bikers, surfers, hikers, divers, and adventurers of all kinds. The festival is renowned for its focus on adventure and wildlife films, offering a unique platform for showcasing the profound connection between humans and nature. With its roots in a photography and adventure film competition, Ascenso Festival has continuously celebrated this interaction,

creating reflection and awareness to preserve the environment—the most precious resource on Earth.

So far, the festival has attracted approximately 60,000 attendees, showcased over 350 videos and 4,000 photographs, and recognized more than 300 filmmakers and photographers for their contributions to the field.



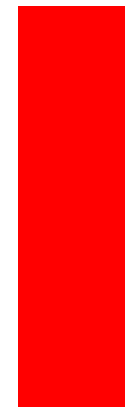
Participation in the Circular Culture Programme

In 2023, Ascenso participated in Circular Culture for the first time, and its successful involvement led to selection for the 2024 edition as well. Although the festival had previously engaged in other partnerships with the British Council, this was their first experience in the programme.

Festival manager and co-founder, Orlando Corona, appreciated the training describing it as "nice and nutritious" due to the exchange of experiences with other festivals. However, he also expressed a desire for more tailored information that could be adapted to the specific needs of smaller festivals like Ascenso.

The funds from the programme were used to bring Keith Partridge, a distinguished adventure filmmaker and educator, to Venezuela. Partridge, an Emmy Award-winning cameraman with over 70 extreme films to his name, has filmed in some of the most challenging environments on Earth, including Everest, the Amazon rainforest, and the Himalayas. He is also the author of the book *The Adventure Game*, which details his experiences and expertise in adventure filmmaking.

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Circular Culture Programme Impact

Impact on capabilities

The most significant finding of the report is that, prior to the programme, festivals had an awareness of environmental sustainability but lacked the practical skills to implement it. Circular Culture acted as a catalyst: 86% of respondents reported an increased level of understanding, and the majority indicated that, without the programme, it would have taken them considerably longer to reach that level.

Tangible environmental impact

Several festivals implemented measurable changes: a reduction in paper use of over 50% (Mar del Plata Film Festival), achieving zero waste to landfill (Estéreo Picnic, Colombia), and the introduction of dry toilets, shared transport, and recyclable materials. The programme also fostered collective commitments: 40% of respondents committed to improving waste management, while 43% aimed to deepen audience engagement.

Impact on audiences and reputation

An initially unforeseen outcome was the expansion and diversification of audiences, explicitly mentioned by 38% of respondents. Participation in Circular Culture also enhances the institutional credibility of festivals, facilitating access to new sponsors and international investment.

Recommendations:

The report highlights persistent financial constraints, unstable political contexts in some countries, and the need for more practical and context-specific training, particularly for smaller festivals with limited resources. It also identifies strong interest among festivals in the creation of regional exchange networks, which led to the development of a “Networking” programme to be implemented in 2026.

Areas of impact on festivals

- Capacity building
- Waste management
- Energy efficiency
- Strategic planning
- Carbon footprint
- Inclusion and accessibility

86% of respondents reported that the programme increased their understanding of environmental sustainability.

Collaboration with the UK:

Nearly all participants were able to collaborate with UK artists for the first time thanks to the fund.

Types of collaboration:

- Artistic residencies
- Knowledge exchange
- Professional mentoring
- Co-creation

Environmental metrics on the implementation of sustainable practices:

- **43% developed greater engagement with audiences**
- **40% implemented improvements in waste management**
- **30% introduced training for their teams**
- **27% reported improved energy efficiency in their festivals**

Longevity and investment attraction: 37.5% of respondents reported an increased capacity to attract investment following participation in the programme.

Festivals reported:

- Greater institutional credibility
- Increased attractiveness to new sponsors
- Audience expansion
- Improved public image

Voices from participating festivals

“It is a unique opportunity to receive financial support in exchange for collaborations with artists and institutions from the United Kingdom. This is a very important differentiator of the programme.”
— *Circular Culture participant, Brazil*

“The work we have done together has been incredible, and we have been able to activate other networks and people in a truly special shared project — that is the real power of Circular Culture.” — *Circular Culture participant, Brazil*

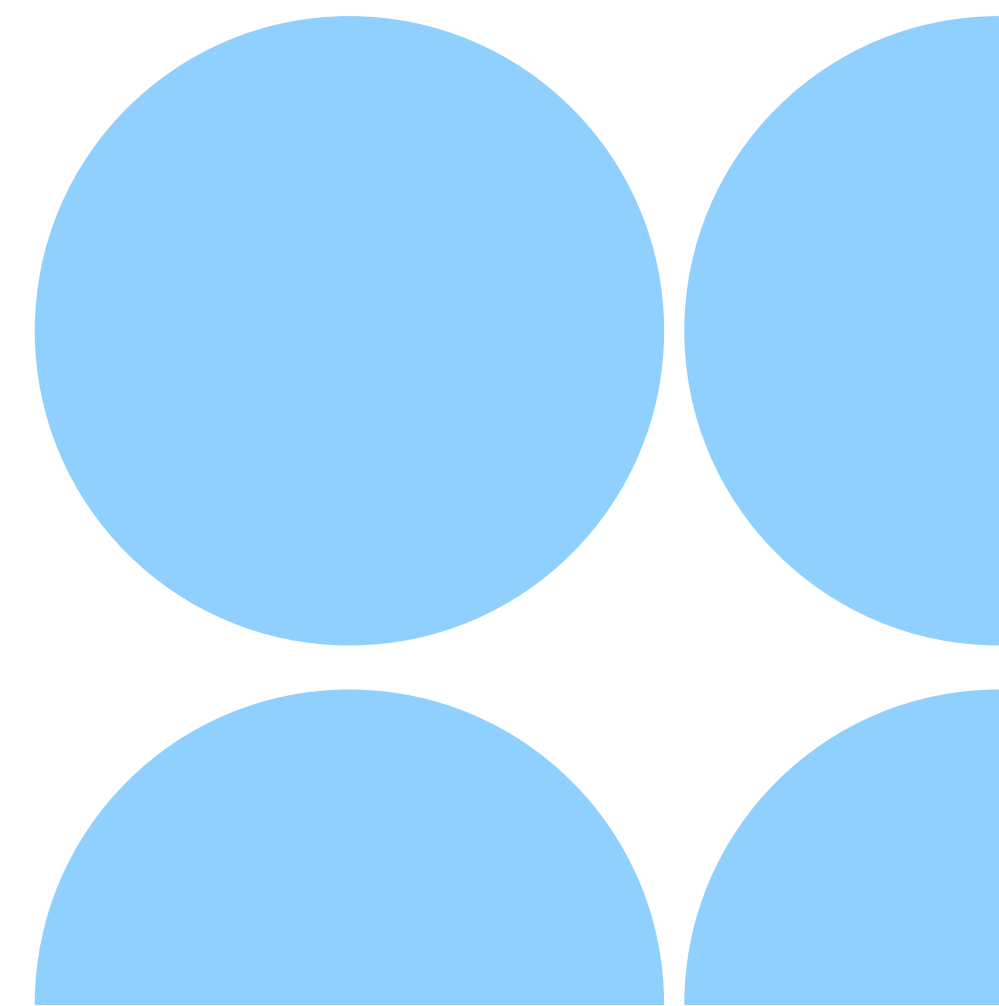
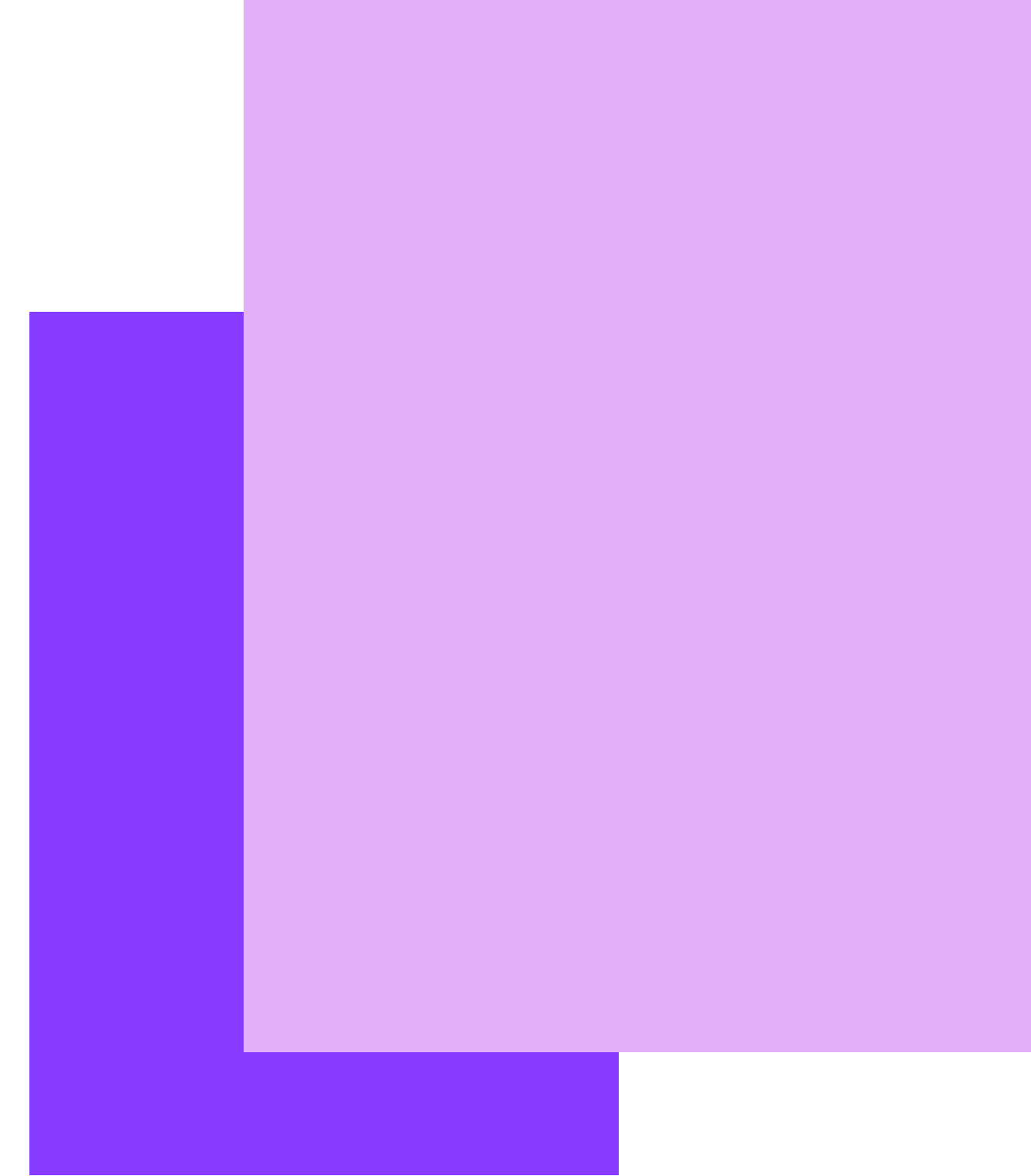
“We have reached new audiences that we did not have before.” — *Circular Culture participant, Cuba*

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Key Learnings

- Sustainability becomes meaningful through concrete consumption decisions. By prioritising local suppliers and optimising resources, Afrodescendencias has transformed its operations into an environmental strategy aligned with its territory. The support of Circular Culture has strengthened this approach by providing tools and institutional backing, enabling these actions to evolve into a long-term sustainable vision.
- When sustainability is integrated through education and the arts, its impact goes beyond the event itself and reshapes habits, conversations, and structures. In Ecomanigua, Circular Culture not only promoted environmental practices such as recycling and healthy eating, but also fostered critical awareness among children, families, and organisers. As a result, art was consolidated as a driver of social transformation, and sustainability became a structural pillar of the organisation.

- Sustainability becomes tangible when it is supported by local partnerships and clear operational decisions. With the support of Circular Culture, Ranchear encouraged sustainable transport and formalised professional waste management, turning impact measurement into a strategic tool. This marked a shift from environmental intention to structured implementation, supported by data and visible actions.
- At Festival Mar, sustainability goes beyond rhetoric and becomes an integrated experience. By embedding it consistently throughout the event, the festival strengthens its identity, deepens its emotional connection with audiences, and positions itself as an authentic reference in culture and environmental activism.
- Participation in Circular Culture encouraged COCO Dance Festival to implement a paper-free programme, aligning its operations with more efficient and responsible practices. Beyond inspiring change, the initiative consolidated sustainability as a structural component of the festival's identity and management model.



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Conclusions

Circular culture has consolidated its role as a catalyst of change in the cultural ecosystem of Latin America and the Caribbean. Throughout these three years, the programme has achieved something essential: to demonstrate that sustainability isn't a luxury or a fad fashion, but an urgent need that can be approached through creativity, community, and transnational collaboration.

What started as an effort to incorporate environmental practices in cultural festivals has evolved into a broader movement that intertwines with education, identity, social justice and cultural diplomacy. The programme's impact is not only measured in precise actions like the reduction of waste or the use of clean energy, but also in the bonds that are created, the narratives they transform and the decisions that are now taken with a stronger environmental awareness.

From the mountains of Ibagué to the pavilions of Guadalajara, from elementary schools in Havana to afro-mexican communities historically ignored, Circular Culture has planted seeds for the future in multiple languages, scales and geographies. Each festival, each alliance, each logistic resistance has contributed to the construction of a new cultural narrative in which art not only reflects the world, but also actively transforms it.

The next challenge isn't small. It requires continuity, adaptability and resources, but also confidence in local processes, in the networks that have been formed and in the ability of the cultural sector to lead deep transformations. If this programme has made something clear is that sustainability is not only a technical matter: it is an ethical stance, a creative act and a way to collectively care for life forms.

