

Beyond Invitation: An Intercontinental Model for Sovereign Shared Governance

A novel governance model for a Sovereign Partnership Model. This model shifts the focus from “inclusion” (inviting Africans into European rooms) to “sovereignty” (empowering African ecosystems) and “co-creation”. It rests on three strategic, interlocking gears: Mobility Justice, Resource Sovereignty, and the Cycle of Return, which function and work together as three interlocking gears. If one stops, the machine stops, directly impacting power imbalances, fragmented governance, and limited African agency.

The *Deconfining Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa* project (2022-2026) was established with a transformative mandate: to create a reference model for decolonised, fair and sustainable intercontinental cultural cooperation. After four years of implementation, involving partners from both continents—Africa and Europe—at various levels of leadership, advisory, implementation, and benefit, the results present a profound duality: we have achieved *artistic closeness*, while maintaining *structural distance*.

While the project succeeded in fostering horizontal connections through direct engagement, the governance model revealed critical gaps in mobility justice and resource equity. Many post-project and activity reports indicate this pattern, with the most recent *Year 4 evaluation* (Wrocław, 2026)

– compiled from 20 comprehensive consortia and partner responses – explicitly noting that while artistic collaboration was a major strength, there remain significant gaps in policy impact and balanced support for African partners.

A cross-analysis of the reports and studies, implemented and published in the framework of the *Deconfining* project as well as the political agendas (such as the [African Union’s Agenda 2063](#) or the European Commission’s [Culture Compass for Europe](#)) reveals that this current cooperation raised awareness and gave recommendations and impulses to stakeholders, but still could not overcome the “triple confinement” patterns: Social (on an epistemic level: hierarchy of knowledge), Political (visas), and Economic (dependency on aid) (Schengen Visa Code, *On the Move*, 2023, p.4).

To address these imbalances, *Intercontinental Model for Sovereign Shared Governance* and its associated infographic propose a novel governance model for a **Sovereign Partnership Model**. This model shifts the focus from “inclusion” (inviting Africans into European rooms) to “sovereignty” (empowering African ecosystems) and “co-creation”. It rests on three strategic, interlocking gears: **Mobility Justice**, **Resource Sovereignty**, and the **Cycle of Return**, which function and work together as three interlocking gears. If one stops, the machine stops, directly impacting power imbalances, fragmented governance, and limited African agency.

The Review: An African Perspective on 2022-2026

An analysis of the *Deconfining* project documentation—including the studies [Movements of Translation and Return: Art, Mobility and the Diaspora](#), (*On the Move*, 2025), the [Schengen Visa Code and Cultural Mobility: Latest Insights with a Focus on Artists and Culture Professionals from the African Continent](#) (*On the Move*, 2023), and the [Year 4 Evaluation Report](#) (Wrocław, 2026)—highlights a clear distinction between the “human” success and the “systemic” failure of the current cooperation system.

The Success of Horizontal Engagement

The most effective decolonial tools were those that removed intermediaries. Partners universally cited direct, in-person formats—particularly residencies, artistic projects, conferences, and international meetings—as the strongest project outcomes. The Year 4 evaluation highlights that these face-to-face formats “have been most effective in fostering intercontinental collaboration, expanding professional networks, and supporting shared understanding across contexts.” [Year 4 Evaluation Report](#) (Wrocław, 2026, p.10)

When artists and cultural practitioners were able to work together, without the administrative burden of “proving” their value to European funders, the “deconfining” happened naturally. The e-publication [Narratives of closeness and distance from Central-Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Africa](#), (*Art Transparent*, 2023) stands as a testament to this, bringing together voices from both continents to explore “indigenous knowledge systems” (*Art as an Encounter*, p. 154) and “female sexuality” (*Towards a Body-Conscious*

Knowledge, p. 68) in ways that were a shared human experience. The lesson of this success is clear: the “New Model” codifies these horizontal spaces as the *standard* mode of operation, rather than an exceptional or special event.

The “Visa Violence” Barrier

The greatest failure of the current model of cooperation remains the mobility regime. The Year 4 Evaluation Report explicitly states that “visa restrictions and other structural barriers significantly limited equitable access.” From an African perspective, this is not merely a bureaucratic hurdle; it is a profound form of **structural violence**, a systemic pattern where administrative structures like discriminatory visa regimes actively prevent African creators from their professional work, achieving their potential and exercising their fundamental right to free movement.

The “Schengen Visa Code” report associated with the project reveals alarming statistics of 45.5% for African cultural applicants [Schengen Visa Code](#) (*On the Move*, 2023, p. 10). The current travel regime enforces a severe physical confinement on artists from the Global South. This systemic inequality serves as a clear mechanism of **gatekeeping**, an asymmetrical power dynamic wherein Northern institutions maintain exclusive control over funding, aesthetic validation, and distribution channels, effectively relegating African partners to a subordinate and dependent role.

The problematic connection between mobility and migration in European policy creates a hostile environment for African artists. A governance model cannot claim to be “fair” if one set of partners travels freely to “extract” inspiration, while the other partner must submit to humiliating scrutiny and arbitrary exclusion at the border to attend their own exhibition. Unsurprisingly, 4 of 5 applicants described the process as deeply stressful, humiliating, and exclusionary ([Schengen Visa Code](#), *On the Move*, 2023, p.10).



The Resource Imbalance

European funding programs like Creative Europe have created important international connections, but their current rules can unintentionally increase inequalities. This creates an opportunity to better align them with the EU's goal of equal partnerships. Because organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa, are located in non-eligible third countries, they cannot legally act as lead coordinators, structurally relegating them to the unequal status of “service providers” who depend on European entities to apply on their behalf.

Since these short-term grants fund immediate project activities rather than local operating costs—such as staff salaries, rent, or local digital archives—African organisations are trapped in a continuous cycle of chasing grants just to survive. Simultaneously, this structural imbalance forces EU-based organisations into a paternalistic gatekeeping role. Even when European creatives seek to collaborate on equal terms, they must carry 100% of the financial and legal liability for the grant, forcing them to police budgets and manage administrative tasks rather than operating strictly as equal artistic peers.

This administrative divide is compounded by a severe infrastructural deficit, as short-term, one-to-two-year funding cycles—commonly known as the “Project Trap”—force African partners into a continuous loop of chasing grants just to survive. Even a so-called “long-term” four-year project such as the Deconfining project can't fully implement an alternative, sustainable infrastructure. Because these funds support temporary activities (such as hosting a residency or staging a play) rather than local operating costs like salaries, rent, or archival maintenance, the “institutional memory” of the cooperation is lost locally and remains concentrated in Europe where the administrative capacity is archived. As noted by Naima Hassan in an [interview](#) for the Deconfining platform, this challenge is deeply infrastructural, directly shaping how knowledge is shared, valued, and stored across borders.

To dismantle this unequal paradigm, the model advocates for **bidirectional empowerment**—an approach that rejects the traditional, one-way transfer of skills from North to South. Under this framework, cooperation becomes a reciprocal exchange. This must be paired with **reverse research**, a methodological inversion of the critical gaze where African experts are commissioned to audit and analyze European cultural policies rather than constantly being subjected to uniaxial evaluations from the North. By shifting from ephemeral project delivery to structural co-investment, this model ensures that funding supports resilient, sovereign institutions.

The EU Perspective on Resource Imbalance and International Cultural Relations

Guided by [Key Direction 4 of the Culture Compass for Europe](#), the EU and Africa horizontal exchange has evolved as a reciprocal process: the EU contributes institutional knowledge and sector infrastructural design that strengthen skills and support robust systems, while African partners activate local knowledge systems within cultural, creative, manufacture, and socio-political contexts. This exchange informs mutually beneficial policy design, fosters inclusive infrastructure for sector development, and advances collaborative approaches that prioritize decentralisation and the creation of autonomous, fair, and equitable systems of operation, aligned with principles of fair collaboration ([Not a toolkit! Fair collaboration in cultural relations: a reflAction](#), EUNIC, 2021)

However, as the [DECONFINING](#) project (2022-2026) demonstrated, this direction requires overcoming profound structural barriers, such as visa gatekeeping and short-term funding dependencies. To move beyond this unequal paradigm, future collaboration must shift toward a '**Sovereign Partnership Model**' that demands bidirectional empowerment—where the EU unlearns paternalistic patterns, and co-investments are directed toward building inclusive, permanent infrastructure for sector development directly on the African continent.



The 3 Strategic Pillars: 3 Interlocking Gears

GEAR 1: THE FOUNDATION: MOBILITY JUSTICE

“Mobility is not a luxury; it is a right.”

The Diagnosis: The Violence of the Gatekeeping

Mobility is the *sine qua non* condition for dialogue. Yet, data reveals profound “structural violence” in the Schengen application process, where 45.5% of African visa applicants receive no justification for their refusal, transforming the procedure into a traumatic and arbitrary process ([Schengen Visa Code](#). On The Move, 2023). The current “invitation” model assumes mobility is available to all, provided they have the right paperwork. The [DECONFINING ARNIE A Handbook to Support Local Stakeholders for Better Relations Between Africa and EU/rope and beyond](#) by Sylvia Amann, (Kulturhauptstadt Salzkammergut / Bodø, Bad Ischl, 2024,) explicitly lists “Mobility Obstacles” as a primary barrier to cooperation.

The New Mechanics: From “Logistical Support” to “Trusted Third Party”

To turn this gear, we recommend three major shifts, that should be integrated into policy and governances:

1. **Trusted Third Party Status:** Cultural institutions must assume the legal role of a “Trusted Third Party,” guaranteeing the professionalism and return of beneficiaries to alleviate the burden of proof. Under this model, European partners must share the risk: if a visa is denied, the European

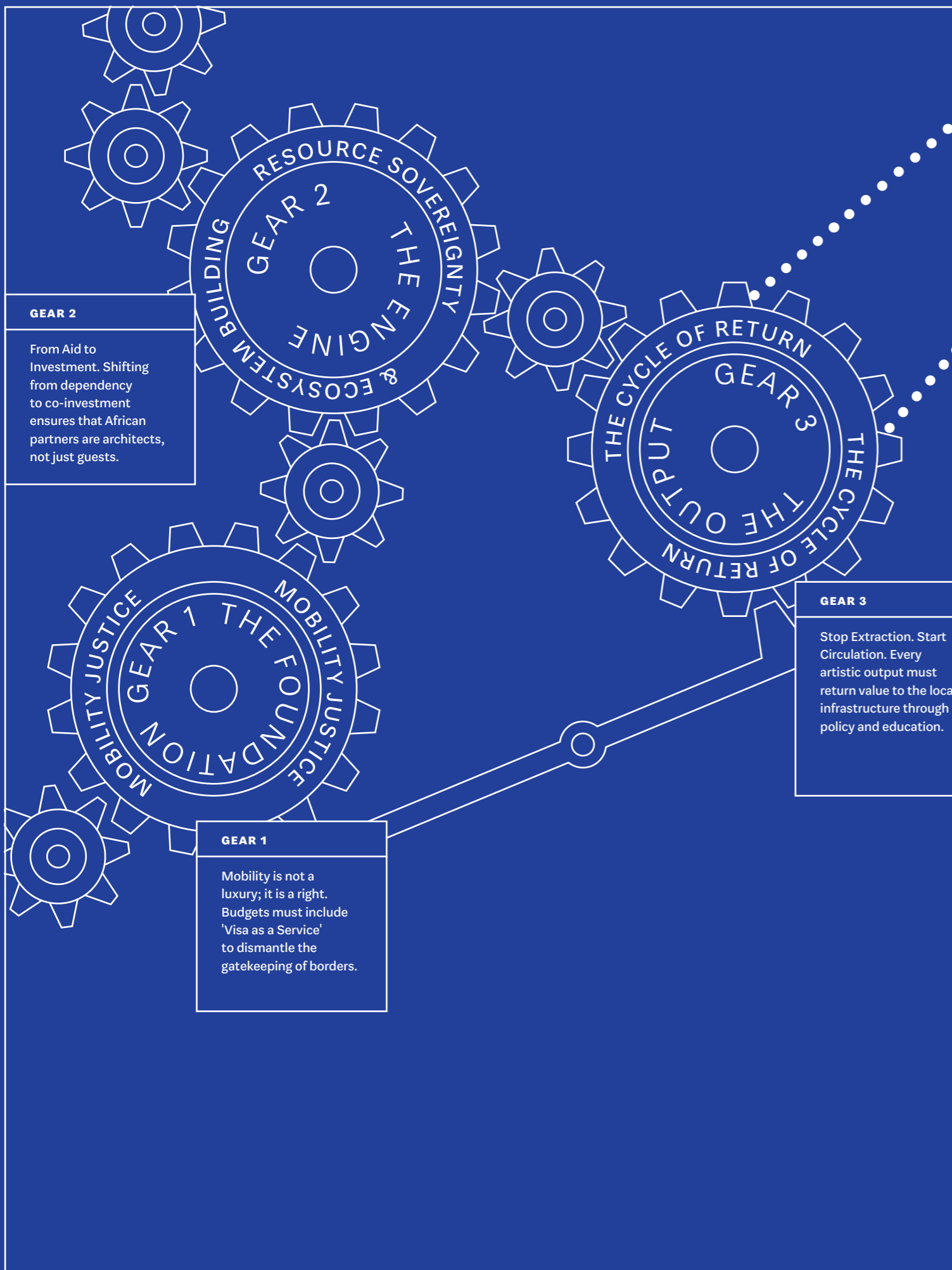
partner must actively intervene in the appeal process, using their institutional weight to advocate for their peers.

2. **Specific Cultural Visa:** Joint advocacy alongside networks like PEARLE* and On the Move must aim for the creation of a Schengen “Cultural Visa” (multi-entry, disconnected from standard employment contracts), aligning migration policy with the EU’s ambitions for intercultural dialogue.

3. **The 6-Month Rule (Preparedness):** The “rapid response” model is obsolete. The model must mandate a “Logistical Preparedness” phase of at least six months before any mobility activity, supported by a dedicated budget line for “Visa as a Service” (VaaS) to cover legal, administrative, and processing fees.

The Recommendation

Future governance must view mobility support not as mere logistics, but as active **advocacy**.



GEAR 2

From Aid to Investment. Shifting from dependency to co-investment ensures that African partners are architects, not just guests.

GEAR 3

Stop Extraction. Start Circulation. Every artistic output must return value to the local infrastructure through policy and education.

GEAR 1

Mobility is not a luxury; it is a right. Budgets must include 'Visa as a Service' to dismantle the gatekeeping of borders.



GEAR 2: THE ENGINE: RESOURCE SOVEREIGNTY & ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

*“From Aid
to Investment”*

The Diagnosis

- **The Project Trap:** Current funding by “project” (ephemeral activities) prevents the building of institutional memory in Africa. Balanced support is impossible if the only financial tap is European; true decolonisation requires financial sovereignty. As long as African creativity is funded solely by European aid, it will remain subject to Western policy shifts.
- **The Diaspora Illusion:** A structural drift looms in the risk of substitution. Working exclusively with the diaspora in Europe because it is logistically simpler must not replace cooperation with continental African territories, which risks invisibilizing local realities.

The New Mechanics:

From Aid to Resource Mobilization

To turn this gear, policy and governance must shift from a project logic of spending to a logic of structural investment:

1. **Territorial Cultural Agencies:** Instead of funding dispersed, temporary events, financial flows must support the creation of permanent, audited Territorial Cultural Agencies in Africa, establishing the credible interlocutors needed to manage funds and define local policies over the long term.
2. **Resource Mobilization:** Instead of Europe funding African initiatives, the model visualizes a **Matching Fund** structure. This involves valuing endogenous capitals (know-how, networks) and using European funds as leverage to mobilize African Capital (such as Afreximbank, the CANEX programme, the African Development Bank, or the private sector) to unlock matching support from African governments. These institutions are not “donors” in the traditional sense; they are strategic investors in African trade and cultural assets. The goal is for the African partner to be an “architect” and co-owner of the project outcomes, rather than just a “guest”.

3. **Ecosystem Building over “Project Delivery”:** The goal of cooperation must be to leave the African partner stronger than when the project started. A percentage of all project budgets must be allocated to “General Operating Support” for the partner (rent, salaries, IT systems), building long-term institutional resilience.
4. **Policy Advocacy:** We must use the project findings to lobby regional bodies like the African Union to create favorable regulatory environments for creatives and to learn from existing EU CCSI policies.

The Recommendation

Future Governance must contribute to genuine **Co-Investment**, not paternalistic “Aid”.

GEAR 3: THE OUTPUT: THE CYCLE OF RETURN

*“Stop extraction,
start circulation.”*

The Diagnosis: Knowledge Extraction

Too often, the value created works, and research is extracted towards the Global North, leaving the local partner without archives or sustainable benefits. Activities often end abruptly with the artistic output (the play or the book) with limited impact, poor documentation, and without feeding back into the local ecosystem.

The New Mechanics:

Epistemic Deconfinement and Unlearning

To ensure systemic change and reciprocity, the policy and governance must integrate three major shifts:

1. **The Body-Archive:** In the accessibility phase, we must recognize that the archive is not just written. Oral traditions, performances, and rituals must be validated as legitimate scientific and cultural data and archived locally.
2. **Unlearning:** Empowerment must be bidirectional. Europe must engage in the process of “Unlearning” about its colonial continuities, while Africa strengthens its technical capacities and works on its decolonial trauma.
3. **Reverse Research:** Inverting the “critical gaze,” African experts must audit and localize European cultural policies to provide unfiltered, decolonial feedback.

The Recommendation

The framework from the [ARNIE A Handbook to Support Local Stakeholders for Better Relations Between Africa and EU/rope and beyond](#) should be adopted as the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for all future governance:

- **A – Accessibility:** Ensuring infrastructure is left behind (e.g., digital tools or open archives).
- **R – Reflection:** Mandatory post-project reflection on colonial dynamics.
- **N – Networking:** Converting “participants” into “alumni networks” that sustain themselves.

- **I – Information:** Research must be open-access, building “archive infrastructures” that prevent the displacement of knowledge to the Global North.
- **E – Empowerment:** Every project must include financial and self-sustainability models, policy change advocacy, and training components for local youth or emerging professionals.

source: ARNIE A Handbook to Support Local Stakeholders for Better Relations Between Africa and EU/rope and beyond Imagined and compiled by Sylvia Amann – inforelais with the support of a diversity of global crowds (Kulturhauptstadt Salzkammergut / Bodø, Bad Ischl, 2024).

The “Cycle of Return” Rule

The new governance model mandates that for every 1 Euro spent on artistic production, a percentage must be spent on “Return” activities (archiving, local workshops, or policy briefs). This ensures that the value created circulates locally.



Conclusion

The DECONFINING project has proven that the involved artists and cultural practitioners are ready to improve a new type of collaboration. We have seen that when the barriers are removed—as in the residencies—the work is profound and transformative. However, we cannot rely on “miracles” or “exceptions” to bypass structural hurdles and violence.

By adopting this **Sovereign Partnership Model**, we move beyond the paternalistic patterns of the past and build a framework where both partners take equal positions. This sovereign partnership model aligns the strategic visions of both continents: A vibrant African cultural renaissance driving continental transformation, and “an EU that champions international cultural relations and partnerships” ([Key Direction 4, Culture Compass for Europe](#), Brussels 2025), rooted in global dialogue and equal footing.

By replacing the traditional administrative management of culture with shared sovereignty—where mobility is secured by Trusted Third Parties, resources are managed locally by African Territorial Agencies, and academic and creative knowledge is circulated through decentralized networks—this framework dismantles historic funding imbalances. It establishes the necessary conditions to transition from an unequal, donor-beneficiary relationship into a genuine, peer-to-peer strategic partnership.

About the Authors

Vydia Tamby: A leading figure in Senegal’s cultural landscape, Vydia Tamby serves as a cultural advisor to the Mayor of Dakar.¹ In 2009, she co-founded *Éditions Vives Voix*, a publishing house dedicated to promoting African cultural heritage and collective artistic creations. With over 15 years of experience in cultural project engineering, she is the co-founder of *Africapitales* and of the *African Archives Fund for the Safeguarding of Memories* (initiated under the impetus of Ghaël Samb Sall), dedicated to preserving African’s tangible and intangible heritage.

Samba Yonga: A communications specialist, cultural curator, and award-winning journalist, Samba Yonga is the co-founder of the *Women’s History Museum of Zambia*. She is also the founder and managing partner of *Ku-Atenga Media*, providing communications services across Africa. Selected for the distinguished *Museum Lab Fellowship* in 2022 (Germany/France) and recognized by *Quartz* as one of the 100 most influential Africans, she specializes in researching and digitizing indigenous African knowledge systems. She holds an MA in Transnational Communications and Global Media from Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Acknowledgements

This publication is a project of many people. We would like to express our gratitude to our colleagues at Art Transparent in Poland and the Institute of Transmedia Design in Slovenia, as well as the entire DECONFINING consortium for their diverse support. Our sincere thanks also go to the authors, Vydia Tamby and Samba Yonga. Their text is the distillation of a comprehensive analysis of the studies and reports produced as part of the DECONFINING project and the result of an extraordinary collaborative writing process. We would like to thank Oleg Šuran for the visualization of the Intercontinental Governance Model. Our thanks also go to all the people and institutions that financially supported this extraordinary project, including the European Union’s Creative Europe program.

Reading and Reference List

Amann, Sylvia: [ARNIE A Handbook to Support Local Stakeholders for Better Relations Between Africa and EU/rope and beyond](#) Kulturhauptstadt Salzburg / Bodø, Bad Ischl 2024. A methodological handbook designed under *Deconfining* to guide fair partnerships, based on the five pillars of Accessibility, Reflection, Networking, Information, and Empowerment (ARNIE). It is adopted as the Standard Operating Procedure for Gear 3.

Bieniek, Karolina: [Deconfining Year 4 Evaluation Report](#), Wrocław, 2026. The most important findings and conclusions of the Deconfining project, based on the survey replies of 20 involved partner organisations and artists.

[Deconfining – Anthology book](#), Croatian National Theatre Ivan Pl. Zajc, Rijeka, 2024. The fingerprint of the Deconfining-project. The texts, selected following open calls for European and African writers and produced during the transcontinental writers’ residencies organised as part of the project.

Mlandu, Ukkona Ntsali: [An Invitation to Transform Your Vision of the Cultural Mobility Ethic from an African Perspective On The Move](#), Brussels 2023. This manifesto challenges the linear, Western academic format of research by prioritizing “healing justice,” “solidarity,” and an “ethic of care” within the social justice agenda. It contrasts Western security paranoia with “African Hospitality”—defined as hosting and welcoming guests with warmth, generosity, and default trust, treating their presence as an honor rather than a burden.

[Movements of Translation and Return: Art, Mobility and the Diaspora](#), On The Move, Brussels 2025. This case study addresses African diasporas in Europe and warns against “substitution drift”—the practice where European organizations hire local diaspora artists to bypass complex visa procedures, isolating continental African ecosystems. It provides the strategic justification for Gear 2.

[Narratives of closeness and distance from Central-Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Africa. A Multicontextual Patchwork](#), Art Transparent, Wrocław 2023. A collective, multicontextual anthology born from artistic collaborations between Central-Eastern European and Southern-Eastern African creators. It serves as the primary qualitative proof of success in horizontal engagement, showing how artistic closeness and trust-based co-creation emerge when freed from administrative constraints.

[Schengen Visa Code and Cultural Mobility: Latest Insights with a Focus on Artists and Culture Professionals from the African Continent](#), On The Move, Brussels 2023. This study analyzes short-stay visa data for African cultural applicants. It reveals that 45.5% of applicants received no explanation for rejections, violating the legal requirements of the Schengen Visa Code. This serves as the empirical basis for Gear 1, proving how migration controls override cultural dialogue. A case study examining the evolving role of North African hubs in shaping new models of artistic mobility and cross-border cooperation across the African continent.

deconfinig.eu

[Interviews with experts of the Deconfining project.](#)

[Culture Compass for Europe of the European Commission](#), Brussels 2025.

[African Union Agenda 2063.](#)

[Movements of Translation and Return: Reimagining Artistic Mobility Between Africa and Europe](#) (On the Move, Brussels, 2025)

[Rethinking Cultural Mobility: Lessons from Morocco](#), Culture Funding Watch, Morocco 2026.

Novotná, Barbora and Pavla Hivert: [Fragments Cultural Cooperation between the African Continent and the States of Central and Eastern Europe Socio-Historical Context, Mapping of Existing Projects and Obstacles](#), Prague 2026.



