ekip Policy Lab

How EU innovation policy can better support CCIs: spaces, infrastructures, and ecosystems

Scoping Note

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1 Introduction and definition

This scoping note focuses on innovation infrastructures and on how EU innovation policy can better support Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) in accessing and using them, addressing a strategic gap in cultural and creative open innovation ecosystems. Infrastructures play a central role in enabling innovation because they provide environments in which experimentation, learning and collaboration can take place[1] .

At the same time, the types of infrastructure and the terminology used to describe them can vary across, and even within EU Member States (MS) and across industrial sectors. For instance, while industrial domains typically consider "cleanrooms", "pilot lines", or "testbeds" as innovation infrastructures, CCIs are more prone to rely on infrastructures such as "living labs", "makerspaces", and "social innovation labs" (see Table 1). These infrastructures are rapidly evolving, increasingly integrating digital technologies[2]. The diverse nature of the CCIs, ranging from audiovisual sectors to crafts or architecture and performing arts, requires a broad understanding of infrastructure. Therefore, for the purpose of this scoping note, **infrastructure** is understood broadly and **includes any public or private space where innovation is co-created, shared or performed**.

Infrastructures are not operating in a vacuum but support and depend on the innovation ecosystem which they serve. Hence, throughout this scoping note, the analysis focuses on two main levels: infrastructures and the wider ecosystems.

- At the **infrastructure level**, CCI infrastructures are understood as shared environments composed of specialised facilities, equipment, capabilities, and support services that enable experimentation, creation, and learning through hands-on practice. They function as hybrid, open, and collaborative spaces where knowledge and skills are exchanged, and where individuals and organisations can develop, test, and refine ideas in a practical setting[3]. Key characteristics of such infrastructures include access to specialised equipment as well as structured and informal skills transfer[4].
- At the **ecosystem level**, the focus is primarily on local and urban contexts, often shaped by the presence of such infrastructures, and enabling innovation, experimentation, and transformation. A typology is used to distinguish between infrastructures that offer primarily offer **technical capacity** (equipment, facilities, prototyping), those that provide **intermediation capacity** (brokerage, facilitation, acceleration, partnership-building), and those that contribute to **field-building capacity** through networks, shared methods and standards. This distinction is relevant because CCI infrastructure gaps are often not only about missing facilities, but also about missing intermediation and weak field-building (standards, shared methods, coordination) that limit sustained collaboration across actors and territories.

In recent years, the European Commission (EC) has adopted several policy measures targeting infrastructures, recognising their role in supporting the transition towards a sustainable, digital and resilient economy and society. These policy strategies are largely structured around the concept of Technology Infrastructures (TIs) (see Table 1). But these strategies, which are still primarily focused on traditional industrial sectors, digital and green technologies, and research-intensive industries, do not specifically address CCIs. The fact that CCIs are not yet incorporated into EU TIs frameworks, in spite of

[1] European Commission. The European strategy on research and technology infrastructures. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/european-strategy-research-and-technology-infrastructures_en

[2] The Horizon project RECHARGE - Resilient European Cultural Heritage As Resource for Growth and Engagement - focused on investigating participatory business models in heritage organisations. https://recharge-culture.eu/processes/knowledge-base/f/51/posts

[3] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Technology infrastructures (2019). Commission staff working document, Publications Office. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/83750

[4] European Creative Hubs Network. Makerspace. https://creativehubs.net/thematic-group.php?cat=3

their growing digitalisation and potential for cross-sectoral innovation, indicates a policy gap. This scoping note is structured as follows. Chapter 1 clarifies **key concepts and definitions** related to infrastructures in the context of CCIs. Chapter 0 then situates **CCI-related infrastructures within the broader EU policy context**, highlighting the current policy vision.

Building on this, Chapter 3 identifies **key challenges and opportunities** affecting the development, accessibility and sustainability of CCI-related infrastructures, drawing on literature review and six scoping interviews. This includes both the main policy problems faced by CCI actors and the opportunity to better leverage infrastructures to support CCIs in becoming more innovative.

Chapter 4 then reviews **existing support measures at EU and national levels**, followed by an **exploration of future trends based on social listening**. Chapter 5 presents future trends based on the *ekip* social listening method. The final section, Chapter 6 **synthesises the analysis through a set of problem statements** that will frame discussions at the *ekip* Policy Lab on spaces, infrastructures and ecosystems supporting CCIs, taking place on the 30th of March and the 2nd of April 2026.

Definitions

To organise and frame the challenges and opportunities linked to the role of the cultural and creative sectors in open innovation, *ekip* relies on a set of open innovation building blocks[5]. These building blocks can be understood as critical elements in the transformation of industrial ecosystems and are essential to the development of functional and sustainable open innovation ecosystems as a whole.

As infrastructures constitute an integral component of these foundational building blocks, it is therefore relevant to examine more closely the intersections between infrastructures and CCIs. Moving beyond a purely facility-oriented perspective, this scoping note approaches infrastructures through the broader lens of innovation ecosystems.

Throughout the following sections, this scoping note proposes **creative infrastructures as experimental practices going beyond considering CCI as intermediaries**, positioning them as active drivers for shaping new approaches for cross-sectoral open innovation pathways and models. It provides the basis for the policy lab to explore how to address this challenge and identify possible policy recommendations.

Therefore, the table below presents the key concepts and definitions used throughout this scoping note. It provides a shared reference framework for the analysis and is intended to support a common understanding of how infrastructures, ecosystems and related terms are applied in the context of CCIs.

Table 1: Key concepts and definitions related to CCIs, infrastructures and ecosystems

Key terms	Definition
Infrastructures	Infrastructures are shared innovative environments composed of specialised facilities, equipment, capabilities, and support services that enable experimentation, creation, and learning through hands-on practice. They function as hybrid, open and collaborative spaces where knowledge and skills are exchanged, and where individuals and organisations can develop, test, and refine ideas in a practical setting.
Innovation ecosystems	Multiple definitions of innovation ecosystems exist[6]. For the purpose of this analysis, we understand **innovation ecosystems as collaborative environments where businesses, research institutions, education providers, and public actors work together to create joint value through innovations whose components have different degrees and types of complementarities**. Enabling conditions for sustained collaboration, co-creation, and experimentation across actors, including citizens and communities. Rather, they provide hybrid spaces embedded in wider innovation ecosystems, enabling interactions between cultural production, research and education, technological development, entrepreneurship, and policy

[5] For a deeper discussion of the building blocks, see European Commission (2022) Blueprint for the development of transition pathways for industrial ecosystems. https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/49407

[6] Granstrand & Holgersson (2020). Innovation ecosystems: A conceptual review and a new definition. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0166497218303870?via%3Dihub

	frameworks, and generating social assets (e.g., trust, networks, and collaborative capacity) that support long-term innovation.
Networks	Networks are understood as structured, intentionally governed arrangements, often member-based, that support participants to connect and collaborate as a set of interconnected nodes. They typically operate through flexible and decentralised coordination, enabling knowledge exchange, peer learning, matchmaking, and the circulation of resources across organisations and places[7][8]. In the context of CCIs, cultural and creative networks can be understood as structures operating across "all sectors whose activities are based on cultural values, or other artistic individual or collective creative expressions"[9][10].From a place-based and ecosystem perspective, networks also act as enabling infrastructures for hybrid urban economies, supporting multi-actor collaboration and the hybridisation of practices across domains (e.g., manufacturing, services, and design) in cities[11].
Technology infrastructures (TIs)	TIs are **facilities, equipment, capabilities and support services** required to develop, test and upscale technology to advance from validation in a laboratory up to higher Technology Readiness Level (TRL) prior to competitive market entry[12]. TIs can take various forms, including pilot lines, testing facilities, digital innovation hubs, open innovation testbeds, Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) centres, demonstration sites, or Living Labs (LLs). Example: Made Competence Center[13]; TEF (Tech European Foundation)[14]
Living Labs (LLs) and Urban living labs	LLs are **open innovation ecosystems in real-life environments,** based on a systematic user co-creation approach that integrates research and innovation activities in multi-stakeholder settings, typically placing citizens and/or end users at the centre of the innovation process. These real-life experimentation environments are often used to test solutions in context, build partnerships, and support iterative learning under real-world constraints. Example: ToMove Lab[15]; Open Living Lab Days[16]
Hybrid Spaces (HS)	**HS** can be conceptualised as place-based experimental infrastructures embedded within broader innovation ecosystems. They connect public and private actors by combining access to physical resources (spaces, tools, services, laboratories) with structured facilitation, brokerage, and programme-oriented collaboration. Beyond providing facilities, HS operate as relational platforms that coordinate situated stakeholders, stimulate cross-sectoral experimentation, and expand access to opportunities, particularly for small and emerging actors within the CCIs.
Prototyping and fabrication infrastructures for creative production (labs, fab labs, maker spaces)	**Spaces that provide access to specialised equipment** (e.g., digital fabrication, textile prototyping, scanning/printing, media production) **and often technical assistance and knowledge transfer.** Their ecosystem value is strongest when access is paired with mediation and support that makes experimentation feasible for SMEs, freelancers and micro-organisations.

[7] Castells. (1996). The information age: economy, society and culture (3 volumes). Oxford: Blackwell.

[8] Castells M. (2000). Toward a sociology of the network society. Contemp. Sociol.29 (5), 693–699. 10.2307/2655234

[9] European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (2023). Creative Europe 2021-2022: monitoring report. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2759/561008.

[10] https://www.frontierspartnerships.org/journals/european-journal-of-cultural-management-and-policy/articles/10.3389/ejcmp.2024.13061/full#B32

[11] Sedini, C. (2022). Hybrid economies in hybrid cities built on manufacturing, networks, and design. In D. Lockton et al. (Eds.), *DRS2022: Bilbao* (Design Research Society). https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2022.818

[12] European Commission. Technology infrastructures. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/technology-infrastructures_en

[13] Made Competence Center. https://www.made-cc.eu/en

[14] Tech Europe Foundation. https://tef.tech/

[15] Torino City Lab. To move. https://torinocitylab.it/en/to-move/

[16] Open Living Lab Days. https://openlivinglabdays.com/

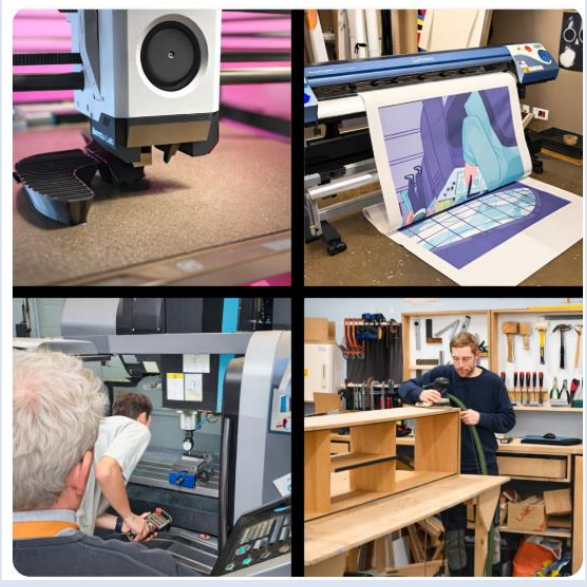
	Example: Textile Prototyping Lab[17]; IAAC[18]; D-house[19]
Urban innovation hubs and accelerators with a CCI interface	Those hubs are **spaces that combine co-working and meeting facilities with mentoring, incubation/acceleration, brokerage and partnership-building**. They can serve as visible entry points into innovation ecosystems, particularly when they intentionally support cross-sector collaboration and reduce barriers for smaller CCI actors. Example: Smart City Lab Milano[20]
Cultural venues as innovation infrastructures	**Cultural venues are not only dissemination venues, but potential shared infrastructures for experimentation, skills development and cross-sector testing**, particularly in areas such as performing arts, audiovisual, and cultural heritage. In this configuration, the "infrastructure" is often a mix of space, expertise, collections/data and institutional legitimacy that enables low-barrier experimentation and public value creation. Example: Studio RE:VIVE[21]

Source: Technopolis group and Polimi

The box below provides a case study of the LiDD School of Design workshop, illustrating how a single CCI infrastructure can combine features of prototyping and fabrication infrastructures, and hybrid spaces. It highlights how such spaces offer both tools and expert guidance to support creative experimentation, prototyping, and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Box 1: Case study: Workshop at LiDD School of Design, Université Catholique de Lille

LiDD is the School of Design at the Université Catholique de Lille, one of France's largest private non-profit universities, founded in 1875 and home to more than 43,000 students. At the heart of LiDD is a workshop with 150 machines spread over 2,400 square meters.



Multiple ways to create, build, test, and prototype

Organised around a rapid prototyping workshop and guided by co-design methodologies, the LiDD workshop is divided into multiple specialised areas that allow students and entrepreneurs to work with a wide range of materials and techniques. These include 3D printing, laser cutting, machining, welding, electronics, painting and finishing, ceramics, textile design, metal and woodwork, plastic fabrication, and even bicycle mechanics. This diverse, hands-on environment enables users to develop and realise projects across disciplines, providing the tools and expertise needed to bring ideas from concept to completion.

[17] Fraunhofer IZM. Projects – Textile Prototyping Lab. https://www.izm.fraunhofer.de/en/institut/projects/completed-projects/tpl.html

[18] IAAC. Fab lab Barcelona. https://iaac.net/about-us/fab-lab-barcelona/

[19] D-House. https://www.d-house.org/en/home

[20] Smart City Lab Milano. https://www.smartcitylabmilano.it/

[21] RE:VIVE. https://revivethis.org/

The workshop has 25 professional members who use the facilities and equipment. All members are business owners who either operate their own firms or are designers. Additionally, the school has enabled interactions with over 40 companies, including Decathlon, Adeo, Crédit Agricole, Center Parcs, and Rabot Dutilleul Construction.

The workshop is also used by 800 students from several faculties and schools of the university who engage in project management or practical workshops to help make concepts more tangible and understandable. Additionally, engineering schools and preparatory programs like Junia and ICAM use the space. IESEG School of Management, which offers its management course at the school, is also welcome.

A community of experts supporting student projects

As part of the workshop, LiDD runs a "Project Room," connecting students with a year-round community of designers, artisans, and researchers. This hands-on, personalised guidance supports both individual and group projects, helping students bring their ideas to life while fostering creativity, entrepreneurship, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. The university also welcomes these professionals daily, allowing students to learn directly from their expertise and observe how they apply the same tools and techniques in their own work.

Source for text and pictures: Fatma Güneri and Nicolas Kittel, LiDD School of Design

2 Policy context and vision

This section situates CCI-related infrastructures within the broader EU policy context, highlighting the current policy vision. It reviews relevant EU strategies, programmes, and initiatives related to infrastructures and innovation, and assesses how, and to what extent, CCIs are reflected within these policy frameworks.

2.1 Broader EU policy context for infrastructures and CCIs

A review of high-level EU policy documents (incl. Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029[22], and the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027[23]) shows a strong emphasis on boosting European macroeconomic activity and driving innovation, with technological sectors receiving primary focus in these documents. In this context, infrastructures, and especially technology infrastructures (TIs), are highlighted as essential enablers of innovation, supporting the development, validation, and market uptake of new technologies. Efforts focus on allocating budgets to technology infrastructure, strengthening financing mechanisms, and improving access to facilities to accelerate industrial and societal transitions in areas such as decarbonisation, digitalisation, and

[22] von der Leyen U. (2024). Europe's choice: Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

[23] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2024). Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027, Publications Office of the European Union, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/092911

technological development (e.g., through the Connecting Europe Facility)[24][25]. For example, having competitive technology infrastructure is seen critical for the development, validation, and scaling of new technologies; without access to specialised TIs breakthrough innovations cannot reach market scale. Direct references in these policy documents to CCIs are limited. Most documents focus on industrial and research-intensive sectors, emphasising shared access to facilities, ecosystem coordination, and commercialisation pathways.

2.2 Infrastructures in CCI strategies and policies

Although most EU high-level policy documents related to infrastructures do not refer to the CCIs, some CCI strategies and policy documents do acknowledge and highlight issues relevant to infrastructures for innovation.

- The **EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026** serves as the core cultural strategy at EU level. Although it does not directly address infrastructures, it highlights ecosystem building and cross-sector cooperation as priorities, implicitly pointing to the need for spaces and collaborative platforms that enable experimentation and knowledge exchange[26]. Moreover, cohesion and regional development policies integrate CCIs into local and regional growth strategies, promoting investment in cultural facilities and supporting infrastructure as part of smart specialisation strategies[27].
- The **New European Bauhaus** (NEB) represents a broader EU initiative targeting science, technology, art and culture together to bridge the Green Deal with the everyday living spaces and experiences of citizens. While NEB primarily focuses on community projects, architecture, urban transformation, and design, it indirectly touches on issues relevant to CCI infrastructures by promoting collaborative spaces, (urban) co-creation environments, and experimentation that bring together designers, artists, engineers, and local communities[28].
- Moreover, the **EIT Culture and Creativity Strategic Agenda 2024-2027** illustrates that CCI stakeholders lack innovation implementation capacity, and more specifically resources and financial security to experiment with digitalisation and emerging technologies such as AI[29].
- Looking ahead, the **Culture Compass for Europe (CCE)** serves as a key strategic tool guiding future EU cultural policy, by for example acting as the strategic anchor for culture within the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The Compass highlights the central role of enabling environments for creative activity, emphasising networks, collaborative spaces, and digital infrastructure that support access, participation, and inclusion across cultural sectors[30].

Taken together, these policies point to the important role of infrastructures in supporting CCIs, even if they remain largely implicit rather than explicitly targeted in high-level EU documents.

[24] European Commission. Connecting Europe Facility. https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/connecting-europe-facility_en

[25] European Commission (2025). Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on establishing the European Competitiveness Fund ("ECF"), including the specific programme for defence research and innovation activities, repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/522, (EU) 2021/694, (EU) 2021/697, (EU) 2021/783, and amending Regulations (EU) 2021/696, (EU) 2023/588, (EU) [EDIP]. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0555R(01)

[26] Official Journal of the European Union (2022). Council resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 (2022/C 466/01). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022G1207(01)

[27] European Commission. Culture in cities and regions. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions

[28] New European Bauhaus. https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/about/about-initiative_en

[29] EIT Culture & Creativity (2024). Strategic agenda 2024-2027. https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/sites/default/files/2025-12/EIT-Culture-Creativity_Strategic-Agenda-2024-2027.pdf

[30] European Commission (2025). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-11/Communication%20-%20Culture%20Compass%20with%20cover_0.pdf

2.3 Specific strategies at the EU-level targeting infrastructures

The European Commission has in recent years adopted several policy measures targeting infrastructures, recognising their vital role in driving the transformation towards a sustainable, digital, and resilient industry and society. The existing policy strategies are structured around the concept of "**technology infrastructures**" (TIs) (introduced in Section 1.1). Policy measures by the European Commission on TIs include the European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures adopted in September 2025, outlining priorities such as increased and improved accessibility to shared infrastructures, and cross-border collaboration to accelerate innovation[31]. The strategy builds upon a portfolio of recent interventions, such as efforts of the Commission Expert Group on Technology Infrastructures (TIs)[32], and other high-level reports (Draghi[33], Heitor[34] and EC Communication on the Competitiveness Compass[35] for the EU) showcasing the importance of such infrastructures in the EU R&I landscape[36]. These efforts have also led to revisions of the EU State Aid rules applying to research and development and innovation, which have been amended to introduce the concept of "Testing and Experimentation Infrastructures"[37].

From an ecosystem perspective, these priorities (accessibility, coordination, cross-border collaboration) are also relevant to CCIs, but they **tend to be operationalised through instruments and categories aligned with research-intensive and technology-driven sectors.** This increases the risk that the "infrastructure problem" is framed primarily as a matter of technology development and scale-up, rather than as a broader capability to convene actors, broker partnerships, and support place-based experimentation. Moreover, **CCIs are not acknowledged in the existing initiatives and strategies, and EU TI policy largely frames TIs around traditional industrial sectors, digital and green technologies, and research-intensive industries**. This indicates a policy gap: CCIs, despite their growing digitalisation and potential for cross-sector innovation, are not yet systematically integrated into TI strategies at the EU level.

In terms of the types of infrastructures launched under the EU's TI strategy, the European Commission has funded **Open Innovation Test Beds** (OITBs), which are testing environments specifically for the nanotechnology and advanced materials sectors[38], and therefore not relevant to CCIs. Other types of instruments launched by the European Commission include **European Digital Innovation Hubs** (EDIHs), i.e. "one-stop shops supporting companies and public sector organisations to respond to digital challenges and become more competitive"[39]. EDIHs can be seen as supporting CCIs, since in the online

[31] The European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures (2025). https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/european-strategy-research-and-technology-infrastructures_en

[32] European Commission Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities. Commission expert group on Technology Infrastructures (E039282). https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=3928&fromCallsApplication=true

[33] European Commission. The Draghi Report: A Competitiveness Strategy for Europe. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/draghi-report_en#paragraph_47059

[34] European Commission (2024). Align Act Accelerate – Research, Technology and Innovation to boost European Competitiveness. https://efmc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/241119-Heitor-report-of-30-September-2024-Align-Act-Accelerate.pdf

[35] European Commission. Competitivenss compass. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/competitiveness-compass_en

[36] Retrieved from: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report_en#paragraph_47059; https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2f9fc221-86bb-11ef-a67d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en; https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/10017eb1-4722-4333-add2-e0ed18105a34_en

[37] European Commission (2022). Communication from the Commission Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation 2022/C 414/01. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022XC1028%2803%29

[38] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2021). Open Innovation Test Beds (OITBs) – Exploiting the huge potential to benefit Europe, Publications Office., https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/161986

[39] European Commission. European Digital Innovation Hubs. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/edihs

catalogue of EDIHs, the sector-filter also includes "Cultural and creative economy" as an option, indicating that 64 EDIHs also offer services for CCI actors. For example:

- **ARTES 5.0** offers innovation services to accelerate the digital and ecological transitions in sectors including CCI (more specifically in crafts, tourism, fashion, cinematography, theatre and cultural heritage[40])[41].
- **Bayern Innovativ** aims to strengthen CCIs by offering them knowledge, networks, and targeted support to help them develop new business areas[42].
- **The Heritage Smart Lab** specifically targets the heritage, cultural, and creativity sectors by offering services to startups and SMEs in Southern Italy to develop innovations in areas such as emerging technologies for theatre and live performance[43].

However, many of the others that are also categorised as being relevant to CCIs in the catalogue, at a closer look, do not seem to specifically target CCIs. Therefore, in practice it remains unclear how much the EDIHs are actually applicable to the CCIs and used by CCI actors.

Taken together, all these efforts to strengthen physical spaces for CCI activities remain underdeveloped at EU level, leaving national and local actors to shape their own actionable environments for cultural and creative opportunities. This reflects the distribution of competences in the EU, where the legislative competences for cultural and creative sectors policies lie mainly with Member States, with the EU playing a supportive and complementary role[44].

3 Challenges and opportunities

3.1 Opportunities

A first key opportunity for strengthening infrastructures for CCIs lies in the social dimension that is inherent to both infrastructures and innovation ecosystems, as defined in this scoping note[45].

Findings from the scoping interviews show that the development and impact of CCI infrastructures are closely linked to the existence of **structured networks and territorial connections**. Interviewees emphasised that key objectives of CCI support initiatives included providing access to new markets, building on existing territorial competences, and creating links between CCIs and more traditional sectors in order to enable **cross-sectoral innovation**. The success and continuity of creative hubs were associated with the **presence of key individuals**, **relay persons** and **local stakeholder groups**. These actors played an active role in connecting hubs and territories, facilitating peer learning, and supporting the circulation of practices. These networks often continued to operate even where funding cycles ended[46].

At the same time, interviewees stressed that **while networks can exist without dedicated infrastructure, infrastructures that are not embedded in local networks and communities struggle to remain viable**

[40] ARTES 5.0. Our solutions. https://artes5.it/en/our-solutions/

[41] European Digital Innovation Hubs Network. ARTES 5.0. https://european-digital-innovation-hubs.ec.europa.eu/edih-catalogue/artes-50

[42] Bayern Innovativ. Erfolgreich kreativ in Bayern. https://www.bayern-innovativ.de/leistungen/kreativwirtschaft/bayernkreativ/

[43] Heritage Smart Lab. Opportunità imprese e startup. https://www.heritagesmartlab.it/opportunita-pmi-startup/

[44] European Parliament (2024). EU culture and creative sectors policy – Overview and future perspective. https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/system/files/2024-11/IPOL_STU%282024%29752453_EN.pdf#page=61&zoom=100,0,934

[45] Beyond physical facilities and equipment, infrastructures are understood as shared, hybrid and collaborative environments in which knowledge, skills and practices are exchanged. Similarly, innovation ecosystems rely on sustained collaboration and complementarities between a wide range of actors. From this perspective, networks and communities are not an add-on to infrastructures, but a core enabling condition for their functioning and long-term viability.

[46] Scoping interview conducted on the 28th of January, Policy Officer within the Service Public de Wallonie (SPW) Economy, Employment and Research, in the Directorate for Economic Policy, responsible for the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).

over time. An infrastructure without a network was described as unsustainable, as it limits knowledge transfer, collaboration, and the ability to scale or replicate successful practices[47]. This dynamic is further illustrated by insights from the **make-a-thek** project[48], where evidence from pilot activities shows that support networks, such as local workshops, mentors and integrated learning modules, significantly improve the uptake of new tools and practices[49].

The Berlin pilot of **make-a-thek** provides a concrete example of these dynamics. Despite the presence of numerous initiatives and makerspaces, stakeholders pointed to fragmented ecosystems and limited coordination as key factors weakening knowledge transfer and community learning. In this context, libraries were identified as a possible solution; by offering accessible premises, they can bring together a wide range of actors, foster collaboration, and support professionalisation. Hosting activities for different levels of expertise, engaging diverse stakeholder groups, and acting as visible network nodes were identified as possible solutions aiming to help generate network effects, strengthen knowledge exchange, and contribute to a more strategically structured local CCI ecosystem[50].

A second key opportunity lies in **better connecting the creative and technological worlds through infrastructures that enable cross-fertilisation between CCIs, technology-driven innovation and business development**. While many technical universities and research organisations host incubators, accelerators and other innovation infrastructures, these environments are typically shaped by technology- and business-led logics. As a result, access for CCIs is often limited, and there are few spaces where creative practices, technological development and entrepreneurial support genuinely intersect.

This gap is becoming increasingly relevant as CCIs are more and more willing to engage with new technologies, techniques and business models, including in lower-technological ecosystems. Access to technology-oriented infrastructures can support CCIs in adopting digital, low-carbon and circular solutions, but also in **experimenting with new ways of producing, organising and creating value**. Importantly, this does not only concern CCIs taking up existing technologies, but also their ability to contribute to the development of new technologies through cross-disciplinary collaboration. When infrastructures are designed as meeting points between CCIs and other sectors, they can facilitate technology transfer, enable applied experimentation and support new partnerships.

Existing creative infrastructures such as fab labs, living labs and creative hubs already play a role in supporting CCIs to innovate. However, the **larger opportunity lies in developing more hybrid infrastructure models that intentionally bring together creative, technological and industrial actors**. Experiences such as the **Tech Europe Foundation** (TEF) in Milan illustrate both the potential and the current limitations of technology infrastructures: while offering access to advanced facilities, such as clean rooms and manufacturing laboratories, **they largely remain inaccessible to CCIs**, limiting cross-sectoral exchange[51].

Innovation districts offer one possible pathway to address this challenge at a broader, place-based level. By combining physical infrastructure with public-private partnerships, local governance arrangements and placemaking strategies, innovation districts aim to create environments where proximity and interaction support innovation[52]. The **Milan Innovation District (MIND)**, developed on the former Expo Milano 2015 site, illustrates how large-scale infrastructure investments can be

[47] Scoping interview conducted on the 28th of January, Policy Officer within the Service Public de Wallonie (SPW) Economy, Employment and Research, in the Directorate for Economic Policy, responsible for the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).

[48] make-a-thek. https://www.makeathek.eu/

[49] Wiedow, Ruiz & de Bastian (2025). make-a-thek Circular Makerspace for Craft & Fashion Recommendations. https://zenodo.org/records/17513266

[50] Ibidem.

[51] Tech Europe Foundation. https://tef.tech/

[52] World Economic Forum (2025). Innovation ecosystems: A toolkit of principles and best practice. https://www.weforum.org/publications/innovation-ecosystems-a-toolkit-of-principles-and-best-practice/

complemented by a stronger focus on social and cultural dynamics[53]. Lessons from MIND point to the importance of designing for interaction rather than function alone, and of balancing "hard" technological infrastructure with "soft" elements that encourage collaboration, creativity and everyday use[54].

For this Policy Lab, the opportunity lies in rethinking infrastructures not only as enablers of innovation for other sectors, but as strategic assets that support CCIs themselves in becoming more innovative. Positioned at the intersection of arts, business and technology, CCIs are well placed to act as cross-innovation bridges, enabling knowledge spillovers, new partnerships and experimentation across sectors[55]. Moving beyond their assigned intermediary role[56], this scoping note frames creative infrastructures as experimental practices that position CCIs as active drivers of cross-sectoral innovation pathways and models, and as a key area for policy exploration.

TIs represent an additional opportunity to strengthen innovation capacity within CCIs, as they play a well-established role, supported by specific EU policies, across industrial ecosystems in reducing investment risks and supporting experimentation. TIs allow organisation to test new ideas, technologies and production processes as well as accelerate the deployment of R&I results[57]. They can also offer cost-efficient solutions by reducing the need for specialised in-house equipment and by providing access to technical expertise for assessing technological opportunities.

While these functions are not specific to CCIs, are rarely formulated with them in mind and are not typically involved within the CCI environment, they are relevant when adopting the innovation ecosystems lenses, in which CCIs are included. In fact, **TIs can support creative actors and organisations in accessing and experimenting with new production technologies, such as 3D printing and scanning**. They provide an opportunity to better integrate CCIs into technology-driven innovation processes.

3.2 Policy challenges

CCI infrastructures, ecosystems and spaces matter as they help address current challenges faced by creative actors and organisations. Many CCIs struggle to adapt to fast-changing technological and market conditions due to limited access to fundings, resources, networks, and spaces for experimentation. As highlighted in the EIT culture and Creativity Strategic Agenda for 2024–2027, this gap in innovation support makes it difficult for CCIs to test new ideas, adopt emerging technologies and develop innovative products or services[58].

This challenge is particularly visible in sectors such as cultural heritage, where the use of new materials, digital tools and technologies, including ICT and AI, is relatively limited. **In many cases, this is not due to a lack of interest or ideas, but to the absence of testing and experimentation facilities**. At the same time, evidence from the OECD shows that many CCI actors face a shortage of affordable, secure and fit-for-purpose spaces, especially in urban areas where rising costs increasingly push creative professionals

[53] MIND – Milano Innovation District. https://www.mindmilano.it/en/

[54] World Economic Forum (2025). Innovation ecosystems: A toolkit of principles and best practice. https://www.weforum.org/publications/innovation-ecosystems-a-toolkit-of-principles-and-best-practice/

[55] European Expert Network on Coluture (EENC) (2015), New Business Models in the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCSs), https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/docs/eenc/eenc-2015-new%20business%20models%20cultural%20creative%20sectors.pdf

[56] Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (2024), Understanding Cultural and Creative Industries and Designing Approaches for its Development https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz20224-en-understanding-cultural-and-creative-industries-and-designing-approaches-for-its-development.pdf

[57] European Commission. Technology infrastructures. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/technology-infrastructures_en

[58] EIT Culture & Creativity. Strategic Agenda 2024-2027 (2024). https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/sites/default/files/2025-11/EIT-Culture-Creativity_Strategic-Agenda-2024-2027.pdf

out[59]. However, **access in rural areas is also defined as challenging**. Some infrastructures have developed ways to reach beyond city centres, for example through **residencies specifically dedicated to CCI actors living in rural areas**[60]**,** or **mobile formats such as buses**[61].

Examples such as **Center Rog**[62] show how **multi-purpose infrastructures can combine different and specialised labs and services in one accessible location**. In their case they provide access to 9 different labs. Having everything in one place makes access easier for creative practitioners, while **still providing facilities that are tailored to very specific needs**[63]. Yet such infrastructures are still the exception rather than the norm. In many territories, there is a lack of spaces that are flexible enough to support different creative practices and encourage collaboration across disciplines.

Taken together, this points to a broader gap in innovation ecosystems: infrastructures that support CCIs are unevenly available, fragmented and often not designed with their needs in mind. **Importantly, this gap is not only about physical facilities or equipment**. It also concerns wider ecosystem conditions, such as **who gets access to innovation opportunities**, **how cross-sector partnerships are built and maintained**, and **whether experimentation is supported as a long-term, place-based activity** rather than a short-term project.

Many CCI actors face limited access to hardware, digital tools and technological resources. Insights from several *ekip* Policy Labs held in 2025 show that smaller organisations and independent creators are particularly affected.[64] Gaps in access to computing power, datasets and specialised technologies create inequalities between regions[65] as well as between large and small actors[66]. Fragmented systems and differences between suppliers also make cross-border collaboration difficult[67]. In line with this, the lack of common standards limits interoperability and the update of circular practices[68].

The cost of upgrading digital systems, complying with regulations or investing in specialised equipment is often too high for SMEs and independent creators[69]**.** As a result, many are excluded from new technological opportunities. Cross-sector collaboration also suffers from the lack of shared infrastructure, with joint initiatives often depending on individual efforts rather than stable support structures[70].

Funding is another important challenge. Smaller organisations often face **high administrative burdens when applying for European-based funding**, which can discourage them from applying altogether[71]. Complex application processes and reporting requirements tend to favour larger and/or established

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[59] OECD (2023). Space for culture: Guidance for cities, developers and creative sectors. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-sub-issues/culture,-creative-industries-and-sports/pdf/OECD-project-Space-for-Culture.pdf

[60] Scoping interview conducted on the 27th of January with Renata Zamida, Director General of Center Rog

[61] Scoping interview conducted on the 29th of January, make-a-thek project

[62] Center Rog. https://center-rog.si/en/

[63] Scoping interview conducted on the 27th of January with Renata Zamida, Director General of Center Rog

[64] Policy Lab on Inclusivity in Video Games, 30th May, 2025

[65] Digital Product Passport: Unlocking Circularity in Fashion & CCIs, scoping note

[66] Policy Lab on Immersive Media, 20th November, 2024

[67] Digital Product Passport: Unlocking Circularity in Fashion & CCIs, scoping note; Policy Lab on Immersive Media, 20th November, 2024; EU Parliament (2024). Digital product passport for the textile sector. STUDY. Panel for the Future of Science and Technology. EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757808/EPRS_STU(2024)757808_EN.pdf

[68] Xu Karaosman, & Wang. (2025). Debunking the digital product passport saga in fashion: Who is doing what, why, how and for whom? https://re.public.polimi.it/handle/11311/1293003

[69] Policy Lab on Crafts-led Innovation, February 2025

[70] Policy Lab on Crafts-led Innovation, February 2025; Policy Lab on cross-innovation with performing arts, 5thJune 2025.

[71] Scoping interview conducted on the 27th of January with Heleen Rouw, Programme Director at the Creative Industries Immersive Impact Coalition'

organisations with more experience and capacity[72]. Where public authorities provide administrative support, access to funding improves[73], but this support is often linked to political strategies which can evolve and shift overtime.

Funding availability is another issue. Financial support for CCI infrastructures is often concentrated at city or national level, reflecting the fact that culture is a supporting competence where the EU can only intervene to support, coordinate or complement the action of its MS[74][75]. At the same time, several stakeholders point to declining public budgets for culture, leading to fewer support, programmes and closure of spaces[76].

Public funding plays a key role in enabling CCI infrastructures to be established and to begin operating. It supports the development of spaces and the initial structuring of ecosystems. However, once this funding period ends**, long-term sustainability becomes a significant challenge**[77]**.** Many infrastructures generate limited and unstable revenue, which makes them highly dependent on continued public support[78]. While some ecosystems manage to adapt or secure further funding, long-term backing from cities or regions remains closely linked to political priorities and can vary over time[79][80].

These challenges are linked to the nature of physical infrastructures. Creative and innovation spaces evolve gradually and require time to become and stay operational. **Funding schemes, however, are often short-term and do not adequately reflect the delays and complexity associated with urban planning or human resources**[81]**.** In addition, limited access to funding that supports experimentation and project development by SMEs and creative practitioners, particularly when co-financing is required, further constrains the ability to build sustained innovation capacity beyond short project cycles[82].

A cross-cutting challenge relates to the diversity of terms used to describe infrastructures relevant to CCIs. The wide verity of labels such as makerspaces, fab labs, living labs, creative hubs or hybrid spaces reflects the richness of the ecosystem, but it also makes it **difficult to develop a shared understanding of what constitutes as CCI infrastructures.** This lack of clarity complicates the analysis of ecosystems and their needs and makes it harder to design targeted and coherent support measures. In the context of this Policy Lab, this challenge required the development of a shared set of definitions to clarify the scope of the key notions and related concepts used throughout the scoping notes (see Table 1 above). In a similar way another challenge is linked to the fact that different local realities across MS pose another

[72] Scoping interview conducted on the 30th of January, BDCC/European Network of Living Labs's Working Group on Culture and Creativity

[73] Scoping interview conducted on the 28th of January, Policy Officer within the Service Public de Wallonie (SPW) Economy, Employment and Research, in the Directorate for Economic Policy, responsible for the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).

[74] EUR-Lex. Division of competences within the European Union. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/division-of-competences-within-the-european-union.html

[75] Scoping interview conducted on the 30th of January, BDCC/European Network of Living Labs's Working Group on Culture and Creativity

[76] Scoping interview conducted on the 29th of January, make-a-thek project

[77] This same issue is highlighted in a 2024 study by the European Parliament, which notes that many CCI actors rely on short-term project funding, making it difficult to develop long-term sustainable business models (online link).

[78] Scoping interview conducted on the 28th of January, Policy Officer within the Service Public de Wallonie (SPW) Economy, Employment and Research, in the Directorate for Economic Policy, responsible for the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).

[79] Scoping interview conducted on the 28th of January, Policy Officer within the Service Public de Wallonie (SPW) Economy, Employment and Research, in the Directorate for Economic Policy, responsible for the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).

[80] Scoping interview conducted on the 27th of January with Renata Zamida, Director General of Center Rog

[81] Scoping interview conducted on the 28th of January, Policy Officer within the Service Public de Wallonie (SPW) Economy, Employment and Research, in the Directorate for Economic Policy, responsible for the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).

[82] Scoping interview conducted on the 27th of January with Heleen Rouw, Programme Director at the Creative Industries Immersive Impact Coalition'

challenge as terms, priorities and even the language used around concepts like sustainability and circularity vary widely. What works in one context cannot simply be replicated in another[83].

Finally, compared to technology and business-oriented sectors, CCIs have access to fewer intermediaries that support innovation. Incubators, accelerators and public innovation agencies are often not adapted to creative practices or are difficult for CCIs to access[84]. This limits the ability of creative ideas to develop into sustainable cultural, social or place-based innovations, and reduces the role CCIs can play within local innovation ecosystems[85]. This point relates back to the opportunity represented by innovation districts highlighted above.

The building blocks help organise and structure challenges related to the role of cultural and creative sectors within open innovation. The table below provides a summary of relevant challenges connected to CCI spaces, infrastructures and ecosystems.

Table 2: Policy challenges related to CCI spaces, infrastructures, and ecosystems

Building blocks	Description of dimensions	Relation to CCI spaces, infrastructures, and ecosystems
Sustainable competitiveness	• Collaboration, networking & cross-sectorality • New business models • Support to start-up & SMEs (including IPR, internationalisation) • Innovation culture & mindset	• Lack of infrastructure for significant cross-domain interaction including labs, tools, and shared platforms • Lack of spaces, both physical and digital, that enable experimentation, collaboration, and exchange across sectors and disciplines • Difficulties for CCIs to scale and innovate in fast-changing technological and market contexts • Limited support structures for start-ups, SMEs and independent creators compared to other sectors • Lack of specific funding for CCI-led innovation
Regulation & governance	• Regulatory barriers to transition & governance model (e.g. partnerships) • Directionality, vision & coordination of ecosystems (incl. multi-level & multi-actor coordination for co-creation & co-design of strategy) • Standardisation • Policy experimentation and reflexivity (including technology foresight)	• Lack of connection of CCIs with widen innovation ecosystems • Fragmented governance of CCI infrastructure across local, regional, national and EU levels • Limited long-term vision for CCI infrastructure often dependent on political cycles • Administrative complexity and burdens that disadvantage smaller organisations • Lack of shared definitions
Social dimension	• Social implication of transition (e.g. digitalisation impacting jobs) • Human-centricity of innovation & ethical development • Involvement of end-users • Connection to Just Transition	• Research infrastructures, such as laboratories and hubs, are often highly technology-oriented and less associated with social & cultural innovation • Lack of cultural spaces for social innovation, where different actors can collaborate and test new practices • Unequal access to infrastructure and innovation opportunities particularly affecting rural areas
R&I, techniques & technological solutions	• New products, Tools, methods, processes • Interdisciplinary & trans- cross disciplinary • Valorisation of R&I results & uptake of technologies	• Limited access to testing and experimentation facilities for CCIs to adopt and shape new technologies • Gaps in access to computing power, datasets, specialised technologies • Fragmented systems and lack of interoperability limiting cross-border collaboration and uptake of circular practices

[83] Scoping interview conducted on the 29th of January, make-a-thek project

[84] *ekip*. Scenarios for imagining new public innovation infrastructures. https://knowledge-bank.ekipengine.eu/resource/scenarios-for-imagining-new-public-innovation-infrastructures/

[85] GIZ. (2022/2024). Guidance on CCI development and enabling structures/intermediation (as used to support the "fewer intermediaries" point).

Infrastructures	• Availability & access to specific infrastructures • (Technical) services and support (tools, methods, space etc.)	• Lack of access to the fundamental tools, data, and infrastructure needed to experiment, collaborate, and implement sustainable practices • Unequal access slows down innovation and perpetuates exclusion • Access to the newest tools, labs, and technical infrastructures is still limited • Early-stage practitioners struggle to access digital technologies and critical data • Shortage of affordable and secure and fit-for-purpose spaces for production, experimentation and collaboration • Few multi-purpose infrastructures combining specialised facilities in one accessible location
Skills	• Adequacy of skills in the workforce • Adequacy of curricula and upskilling offer • Soft skills & cultural mindset	• Access to Tis require technological and specific skills • Opening TIs to CCIs requires a cultural shift in the understanding of innovation (breaking silos requires soft skills for all actors involved)
Investment & funding	• Access to funding & financing • Innovation procurement	• High administrative burden limiting access to European funding for smaller CCI organisations • Funding availability concentrated at local or national level, with declining public budgets for culture in some contexts • Short-term funding schemes misaligned with the long-tern nature of physical infrastructures • Limited revenue streams and high dependency on public funding

Source: Technopolis group and Polimi

3.3 Stakeholder needs

Building on the challenges identified above, stakeholders who took part in *ekip* Policy Labs highlighted the following needs related to access, stability and usability of infrastructures:

- Reliable and accessible infrastructure as a basic condition for innovation, production and competitiveness, particularly for smaller and independent actors.
- Improved access to shared digital tools and technology infrastructure[86][87][88]
- More interoperable systems and clearer standards to support collaboration, data exchange and the implementation of circular practices across organisations, sectors and borders [89][90].
- Affordable physical spaces for production, experimentation and collaboration, moving beyond short-term or temporary solutions that provide little long-term security [91].
- Shared infrastructures that reduce individual costs and risks, particularly in relation to digital upgrades, regulatory compliance and access to specialised equipment[92] .

[86] Policy Lab on Inclusivity in Video Games, 30th May, 2025

[87] Digital Product Passport: Unlocking Circularity in Fashion & CCIs, scoping note

[88] Policy Lab on Immersive Media, 20th November, 2024

[89] Digital Product Passport: Unlocking Circularity in Fashion & CCIs, scoping note; Policy Lab on Immersive Media, 20th November, 2024; EU Parliament (2024). Digital product passport for the textile sector. STUDY. Panel for the Future of Science and Technology. EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757808/EPRS_STU(2024)757808_EN.pdf

[90] Xu Karaosman, & Wang. (2025). Debunking the digital product passport saga in fashion: Who is doing what, why, how and for whom? https://re.public.polimi.it/handle/11311/1293003

[91] Policy Lab on Crafts-led Innovation, February 2025

[92] Policy Lab on Crafts-led Innovation, February 2025; Policy Lab on cross-innovation with performing arts, 5thJune 2025.

- Flexible and purpose-built spaces that actively support cross-sector collaboration, enabling experimentation between CCIs and other sectors without relying on ad hoc or individual initiatives.
- More inclusive access to infrastructure and innovation opportunities, ensuring that underrepresented groups, small-scale creators and actors in less digitally ready regions are not excluded from technological development, market access and cross-sector innovation initiatives [93][94][95][96].

In addition, feedback gathered through the **Call for Evidence for the European Innovation Act** highlights the **need for innovation environments that support participation, experimentation and learning as ongoing practices**.[97] Participatory innovation spaces, such as living labs, temporary use spaces and civic innovation hubs, are seen as particularly valuable in bringing together creative practitioners, public authorities, researchers and citizens. These spaces enable real-life experimentation, support place-based innovation and help build trust and collaboration across sectors.

The same feedback also points to the importance of **strengthening future-oriented skills as part of innovation ecosystems**. This includes problem-solving, collaboration and the ability to engage with emerging technologies, including AI. More broadly, there is a need to support an innovation culture that values experimentation and learning over short-term outputs.

4 Support measures

4.1 EU programmes

Although there is no single, comprehensive EU strategy or policy measure specifically dedicated to spaces and infrastructures in the CCIs, the EU supports their development and use through several of its funding programmes for research, education, and the cultural sector. **Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe** projects have mainly addressed infrastructures indirectly, by supporting collaborative research, experimentation, and ecosystem-building approaches, and with some Horizon Europe projects explicitly addressing access to infrastructures, the development of shared spaces, and related digital tools. **Creative Europe** has contributed to access to and development of CCI-relevant infrastructures across different subsectors, including through support for tools, technologies, and production capacities. Complementing these approaches, **Erasmus+** has funded initiatives to strengthen the skills, knowledge, and cross-border collaboration needed for CCI actors to effectively engage with and make use of existing and emerging spaces and infrastructures. Regional development programmes like **Interreg** have supported transnational projects aiming to strengthen local creative ecosystems (through for example funding for local CCI spaces) and foster cross-border collaboration between local CCI actors.

The analysis of relevant EU projects was primarily conducted at the scale of individual facilities and infrastructures, although many of the identified relevant projects also have an important ecosystem-level dimension, as they relate to networks of actors, access mechanisms, and coordination across local, regional, national, and European levels.

Horizon 2020 & Horizon Europe

Horizon 2020 projects addressing spaces, infrastructures and ecosystems mainly adopted a conceptual and methodological approach, rather than directly providing CCIs with access to tools, laboratories or production spaces. These projects focused on building ecosystems that enable collaboration,

[93] Policy Lab on Inclusivity in Video Games, 30th May, 2025

[94] Policy Lab on cross-innovation with performing arts, 5thJune 2025

[95] Policy Lab on NEB (The role of the CCI in the green transition), 15th April 2024

[96] Digital Product Passport: Unlocking Circularity in Fashion & CCIs, scoping note

[97] European Commission. Call for evidence for the European Innovation Act. https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14593-European-Innovation-Act_en

participation and knowledge spillovers, with infrastructures seen as facilitators of interactions rather than as operational spaces.

For example, **HUB-IN**[98] worked with eight cities to regenerate Historic Urban Areas developing networks of physical and digital innovation hubs, including for CCIs, and defined infrastructures as available structures or facilities that support proximity, co-creation and interaction between different stakeholders[99]. Similarly, **Innocult**[100] and **T-Factor**[101] considered infrastructures as spaces or thematic hubs for research, communication and knowledge exchange.

Horizon Europe supports several research and innovation projects within the CCIs that operate using a specific methodology: **LLs to test, refine and support the development of new ideas**. In this sense, they create ecosystems across the EU to share and co-create innovative practices[102]. Additionally, a couple of HE projects specifically aim to address the need to access infrastructures and develop common spaces, as well as digital tools. Among them, **make-a-thek**[103] is a project whose objective is to set up creative maker spaces in public libraries, offering open access to libraries' premises and providing tools, courses and resources to foster innovation and local business ideas, with a specific focus on fashion and crafts. Another example is the **European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage** (ECCCH) which represents a major investment in digital infrastructure for the cultural sector[104]. The Cloud will connect cultural heritage organisations, researchers, and professionals through shared tools for digitisation, preservation, data management, and collaboration. It is designed to ensure that smaller and remote institutions can access the same resources as larger ones, helping reduce digital divides across the sector.

The new **Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026-2027**[105] includes a set of horizontal Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs) aimed at strengthening TIs, primarily under **Cluster 4**. These calls focus on capacity building, access, coordination, and visibility of TIs, rather than on the development of sector-specific infrastructures. In particular, the calls address (i) skills and capacity building for TI staff, including management and operational capabilities (HORIZON-CL4-2026-01-MAT-PROD-44); (ii) pilot access schemes designed to facilitate the use of TIs by European startups, scaleups, and innovative SMEs (HORIZON-CL4-2026-01-MAT-PROD-45 and HORIZON-CL4-2027-01-MAT-PROD-47); and (iii) mapping and service discovery, through the development of a service finder to improve transparency and accessibility of TIs at European level (HORIZON-CL4-2026-01-MAT-PROD-46). While these actions are horizontal in nature and potentially applicable across sectors, they are framed primarily around industrial and technology-driven innovation contexts. CCIs are not explicitly referenced as target users or beneficiaries, which may limit the alignment of these instruments with the needs and operating models of CCI-related infrastructures.

Creative Europe

Several Creative Europe projects actively contribute to infrastructure access provision and development in CCIs across Europe in different sub sectors. The types of infrastructures they provide access to include

[98] CORDIS. Hubs of Innovation and Entrepreneurship for the Transformation of Historic Urban Areas. https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/869429

[99] HUB-IN (2023). The HUB-IN Framework. https://hubin-project.eu/library/hub-in-framework-overview/

[100] CORDIS. Centre of Excellence for Cultural and Creative Innovations in Lithuania. https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/763748/results/de

[101] CORDIS. Unleashing future-facing urban hubs through culture and creativity-led strategies of transformative time. https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/868887/news

[102] Examples of such projects include HEPHAESTUS, TransMIXR, CRAFT-IT4SD or CROCUS.

[103] make-a-thek. https://www.makeathek.eu/

[104] European Commission. The Cultural heritage Cloud, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/social-sciences-and-humanities/cultural-heritage-and-cultural-and-creative-industries-ccis/cultural-heritage-cloud_en

[105] European Commission (2025). Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026-2027: 7. Digital, Industry and Space. https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2026-2027/wp-7-digital-industry-and-space_horizon-2026-2027_en.pdf

digital fabrication tools/techniques and testbeds. **Made@EU** project offered creatives access to digital fabrication equipment (e.g. 3D printing and scanning) at various European research and education centres. The project also offered creatives with guidance and support from local digital fabrication teams[106]. **ACuTe** targets the development of culture testbeds that explore new forms of interactivity, digital collaboration, and audience engagement. It brings together theatres, universities, and arts organisations to pilot emerging technologies and build capacity for future-oriented cultural infrastructures bridging artistic production with advanced digital tools and performance systems[107]. In **CulturalCorners**, innovation labs are created where artists, technologists, cultural operators, and local stakeholders collaborate to co-develop new digitally enabled cultural products, services, and workflows, positioning these labs as shared experimentation environments for the cultural and creative industries[108]. The **FUSION** project set out to provide access to digital fabrication technologies for fashion and textile designers and companies, by operating residency programmes that offered participants access to digital technology and fabrication.[109] **METAVENUES** aimed to re-evaluate the value model of performing arts venues by establishing collaborative research and living lab environments where stakeholders could co-design and prototype new technology-enhanced concepts and practices for European performing arts venues[110]. All of these projects are funded under Creative Europe's Cooperation Projects-strand, which aims to support transnational collaboration among CCI actors, foster innovation, and facilitate knowledge and resource sharing across European countries[111].

Erasmus+

The relevance of Erasmus+ projects in relation to TIs in CCIs, lies in their potential to train CCI actors to use new tools, and therefore be more able to use advanced infrastructure. For example, **SCIL**, the Social and Cultural Innovation Labs project, fostered students' competences to use arts-based tools and competences to collaborate and develop creative and innovation solutions around societal challenges[112]. **Innovation Lab 2.0** aims to increase the capacity of social organisations to use cutting-edge technologies for impactful storytelling[113]. Other Erasmus+ projects have led to the creation of Living Labs (LLs). In **DeuS**, several Living Labs were established to provide support for local communities, professionals, and VET learners to conduct research and develop innovative products and services[114]; where as **GreenCCircle** aims to equip CCIs with tools for sustainable transformation, and among other activities operates a

[106] European Commission Culture and Creativity. Made@EU. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/projects/search/details/552170-CREA-1-2014-1-ES-CULT-COOP1

[107] European Commission Culture and Creativity. ACuTe - Culture Testbeds for Interactivity, Performance and Technology. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/projects/search/details/101055953

[108] European Commission Culture and Creativity. CulturalCorners - Reimagining Low Season Tourism in European Corners Through Arts and Heritage. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/projects/search/details/101173766

[109] European Commission Culture and Creativity. FUSION: Fashion Up-Skilling Innovation Network. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/projects/search/details/607618-CREA-1-2019-1-IE-CULT-COOP1

[110] European Commission Culture and Creativity. METAVENUES - The European Performing Arts Venues of the Future. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/projects/search/details/101131437

[111] European Commission Culture and Creativity. European Cooperation projects. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand/european-cooperation-projects

[112] European Commission Erasmus+. Social and Cultural Innovation Lab.s https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-DE03-KA227-SCH-093380

[113] European Commission Eramus+. Innovation Lab 2.0 - Virtual Production and Sustainable Innovation in the Cultural and Creative Sector". https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2024-1-EL02-KA210-YOU-000251197

[114] European Commission Erasmus+. European Open Design School for Sustainable Regional Development. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/612653-EPP-1-2019-1-IT-EPPKA2-SSA-P

network of LLs[115] where CCIs work together to explore, test, and co-create sustainable solutions in for instance the audiovisual sector and circular design[116].

Interreg

The EU has also supported CCI infrastructures through regional development programmes, aiming to strengthen local creative ecosystems, foster cross-border collaboration, and promote sustainable urban and cultural regeneration. Programmes like **Interreg** provide funding, technical expertise, and a platform for transnational cooperation, allowing cities and regions to share best practices and test innovative approaches. This type of support is important for CCI infrastructure, as such spaces require long-term investment, stakeholder coordination, and alignment with urban planning strategies. As an example, Interreg Central Europe's **Second Chance** project, running from 2010 until 2013, illustrates this approach. The transnational cooperation project aimed to revitalise and convert former industrial complexes into cultural centres in several European cities, including Ljubljana, Nuremberg, Krakow and Venice[117][118]. Key methods in this project included stakeholder workshops with local authorities, neighbours, potential partners, and cultural actors to gather feedback on what the revitalisation should look like. The participatory approach helped ensure that the resulting plans reflected local needs, fostered community engagement, and promoted sustainable reuse of industrial heritage for cultural and creative purposes[119].

4.2 National programmes

Across Europe, several national programmes already illustrate how local infrastructures and how structured networks can strengthen CCIs. These initiatives often combine ecosystem-building functions, business development support, physical facilities, and services that connect creative actors with SMEs, public authorities, and academia. They also pursue cultural, social, and economic goals simultaneously, supporting both creative practice and entrepreneurial activity[120].

Examples of national programmes and funding streams that target infrastructure development in CCIs include:

- **Wallonia's Creative Hubs Policy** (Belgium): The Walloon government launched in 2014 a call for projects for creative hubs, by providing workspaces, training, and innovation support while linking cultural actors with industry and public partners. The aim of the programme was to bring together diverse stakeholders and encourage the transition towards a more creative economy, by implementing notions of open innovation, design thinking and collective intelligence in a local context[121] [122].

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[119] Nuernberg (2012). Revitalisation through arts and culture: New developments for 5 European industrial complexes. https://www.nuernberg.de/imperia/md/kuf_kultur/dokumente/second_chance/second_chance_revitalization_arts_culture_mid-project.pdf

[120] Video Games and Inclusivity Recommendation paper

[121] Interreg Europe (2024). Policy Brief from the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform for a smarter Europe: Cultural and Creative Industries. https://www.interregeurope.eu/sites/default/files/2024-01/Policy%20brief%20on%20Cultural%20and%20Creative%20Industries.pdf

[122] Interreg Europe (2018). The Creative Hubs policy: the example of Wap's hub : the creative hub of the city of Tournai. https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/the-creative-hubs-policy-the-example-of-waps-hub-the-creative-hub-of-the-city-of-tournai

- **Officina Creativa Lab** (Italy): The municipality of Florence in partnership with other local actors operates the Officina Creativa Lab, a multifunctional and multi-sector space for crafts, fostering collaboration and experimentation, offering shared spaces and resources for creatives and SMEs [123][124].
- **CLICKNL field labs** (Netherlands): CLICKNL, the Dutch Knowledge and Innovation Network of the Creative Industry, operates a public-private partnership (PPP) scheme that funds field labs used by the creative industries for short-term industrial research[125]. These facilities are function as practical environments where companies, knowledge institutions and public sector actors work together on rapid development and testing of new applications, often involving emerging technologies[126]. CLICKNL supports field labs in areas such as gaming[127], arena[128] and live-event experiences[129], and VR[130] and immersive design[131]. The labs provide access to specialised equipment and facilities, and enable collaborative research, prototyping and pilot projects. Although not labelled as technology infrastructures, they effectively act as shared facilities that lower the threshold for CCI companies to engage in R&D.
- **CIIC's IX Labs** (Netherlands): Another relevant Dutch example is the development of IX Labs, part of the Creative Industries Immersive Impact Coalition (CIIC) funded by the National Growth Fund. IX Labs are being set up as a national network of regional facilities dedicated to immersive technologies and experience design. The labs will provide access to tools such as advanced XR hardware, motion-capture tools, 360-degree imaging equipment, user-testing and experimental spaces, digital content libraries and collaboration opportunities with other labs and partners. Their purpose is to strengthen the Dutch immersive ecosystem and support the development, testing and scaling of immersive applications across culture, media, gaming, manufacturing and public-sector contexts. The IX Labs are selected through an open call managed by TNO, which will integrate several regional hubs into a coordinated national infrastructure. In practice, they establish a dedicated technical infrastructure for immersive R&D within the creative industries[132].
- **Creatività Contemporanea's Creative Living Labs** (Italy) – The Italian Ministry of Culture launched the Creative Living Lab public call in 2018 to fund collaborative projects for the regeneration of Italian suburbs, with a strong emphasis on participation and cultural practice as an engine for local transformation. In practice, Creative Living Lab works by enabling coalitions of local actors to organise and deliver collaborative regeneration projects. Rather than providing a single facility, it offers a structured programme frame and resources that make it possible to prototype cultural and creative interventions in neighbourhood contexts, build partnerships across sectors, and test participatory approaches that can later be adapted or scaled[133].

[123] Interreg Europe (2024). Policy Brief from the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform for a smarter Europe: Cultural and Creative Industries. https://www.interregeurope.eu/sites/default/files/2024-01/Policy%20brief%20on%20Cultural%20and%20Creative%20Industries.pdf

[124] Interreg Europe (2021). Officina Creative. https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/officina-creativa

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[127] CLICKNL. DGA Gaming Fieldlab, https://www.clicknl.nl/en/gaming-fieldlab/

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[129] CLICKNL. Fieldlab Events, https://www.clicknl.nl/en/field-lab-events/

[130] CLICKNL. Virtual Worlds Fieldlab, https://www.clicknl.nl/en/fieldlab-virtual-worlds/

[131] CLICKNL. VR design methods lab, https://www.clicknl.nl/en/fieldlab-vrdml/

[132] CLICKNL, (2025). IX Labs. https://www.ciiic.nl/en/calls/ix-labs

[133] Direzione Generale Creatività Contemporanea. Creative Living Lab, https://creativitacontemporanea.cultura.gov.it/creativelivinglab/

4.3 Relevant EU-level networks

In additional EU-funded and national-level projects, several EU-level networks play an important role in addressing challenges related to infrastructures for CCIs by supporting coordination, knowledge exchange, capacity building, and advocacy. These networks do not typically operate infrastructures themselves, but act as intermediaries and ecosystem builders, helping to connect local and regional initiatives, influence policy debates, and disseminate practices related to access, governance, and sustainability of shared spaces.

A prominent example is the **European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL)**, which brings together living labs across Europe. Through its Culture and Creative Working Group, ENoLL supports cross-sectoral collaborations, promotes the adoption of living lab practices in designing and developing services and products in CCIs, and creates a communication channel for the dissemination of best practices regarding the use and operation of living lab methodologies in CCIs[134]. Another example is the **European Creative Hubs Network**, a peer-led network, which aims to enhance the economic and social impact of creative hubs. These hubs act as shared spaces and local infrastructure nodes, providing access to networks, skills, and collaborative opportunities that support sustainable growth in the CCI ecosystem. The network helps hubs pool resources, share best practices, and build capacity through peer-to-peer learning, staff exchanges, workshops, and alliances, reinforcing transnational collaboration and knowledge exchange among the hubs[135].

5 Future trends

As part of *ekip* project activities on studying CCI infrastructures, spaces, and ecosystems, a social listening exercise has been conducted to collect and analyse ongoing social media discussions and exchanges concerning the topic (on platforms incl. YouTube, Instagram, and Reddit). The key takeaways from this exercise are the following:

- **Spaces and places**: Online discussions focus on what CCI actors expect from physical spaces, underscoring that creative infrastructures are not one-size-fits-all. Different practitioners have distinct needs: some prioritise well-equipped, dedicated workspaces that allow for independent production, while others seek environments that encourage networking, collaboration, and exchange with peers. The findings suggest that spaces capable of accommodating both autonomous work and meaningful social interaction remain limited, pointing to a gap between the diverse needs of creative professionals and the infrastructures currently available to them.
- **Social ecosystem**: A key insight gathered from online discussions concerns the social aspect of infrastructures, including the people, communities, and relationships that make them meaningful. CCI infrastructures and spaces are "kept alive" by those who invest in them, use them, and take care of them, with the social and ecosystem-building aspect being just as important as the physical one.
- **Technologies, tools, and experimental practices**: The intersection between CCIs and technology-focused environments such as incubators, accelerators, and digital fabrication labs is increasingly discussed. How these spaces intersect, particularly around themes like applied experimentation, the role of the creative technologist, digital fabrication, and virtual studios is being examined. While there is growing interest in collaboration between the two ecosystems, they largely continue to operate side by side rather than as an integrated whole. The most reliable meeting point between them is the prototyping workshop: a practical, problem-solving setting where differing approaches are pushed to collaborate, often through public–private partnerships rather than deliberate structural alignment.
- **Funding, value, and long-term transformation**: The financial aspect of operating CCI infrastructures remains critical, including topics such as long-term sustainability and stability, revenue generation, as

[134] European Network of Living Labs. Working group – Culture and creativity. https://enoll.org/working-group/culture-creativity/

[135] European Creative Hubs Network. About us. https://creativehubs.net/about-us.php

well as public value. Although grants are highlighted as essential enablers allowing infrastructures and spaces to open, they as well as many other financial instruments are temporary, and many spaces and infrastructure providers do not have a sustainable business model from the start of their operations.

- **Intentional spaceshifting**: An emerging trend toward more fluid and adaptive spatial models is redefining how physical environments are conceived and used. While flexibility and multi-functionality are increasingly expected from CCI infrastructures, the spaces gaining the most traction are those that are carefully curated around specific audiences and purposes rather than trying to do everything at once. Their impact comes from bringing together different stakeholder groups and practices to create moments of exchange. Meanwhile, civic institutions are becoming more agile and market-aware, while privately operated venues are stepping into civic and cultural roles once dominated by the public sector, signalling a broader transformation in how social, cultural, and commercial functions are distributed. Within this broader trend, several upcoming trends are expected to emerge:
  - **Redefining fit-for-purpose**: Spaces are becoming more intentionally designed to bring particular audiences into contact, and therefore, being "fit-for-purpose" is no longer just about having the right facilities. Instead, it will increasingly be about whether a space foster the kinds of interactions, collaborations, and communities it aims to generate, not simply whether it is functionally equipped.
  - **Rise of the curator-operator**: This kind of intentional shapeshifting cannot function automatically, but it depends on hybrid professionals who combine the skills of a cultural programme, community organiser, and business strategies. These individuals must balance a clear creative vision with the practical demands of long-term financial and operational viability.
  - **Blurring typologies, straining policy**: As privately run spaces take on civic roles and public institutions adopt commercial practices, traditional categories used to define and fund creative infrastructure begin to break down. Policy systems built on clear public–private distinctions may struggle to respond to spaces that operate across these boundaries.
  - **Relevance as a new key driver**: Audience engagement and income are increasingly shaped by a space's editorial identity rather than its size or location. Spaces that can articulate and deliver a strong curatorial direction are likely to gain advantage, while those lacking the expertise to activate their assets meaningfully risk falling behind, not because of physical limitations, but due to limited creative capacity.

Taken together, these future trends point to a shift towards more adaptable, agile, curated, and socially engaged CCI infrastructures, spaces, and ecosystems. The physical design of spaces is no longer sufficient on its own; the social networks, communities, and interactions that a space facilitates are equally, if not more, important. For CCI infrastructure operators and stakeholders, this evolution carries practical implications: business models and funding strategies must be rethought to ensure long-term financial sustainability, while operational approaches need to prioritise the diverse needs and expectations of users. Success will increasingly depend on the ability to curate meaningful experiences, and foster collaboration across disciplines.

6 Problem statements

The *ekip* Policy lab focuses on a set of core issues around infrastructures, spaces, and ecosystems that are expected to play a crucial role in shaping policy recommendations and future policy measures. These policy statements build directly on the challenges identified during the scoping phase. Rather than treating innovation as a standalone topic, each problem statement integrates it as an inherent element of the challenge being examined.

Ensuring inclusive and sustained access to fit-for-purpose infrastructures, laboratories, and innovation networks for CCIs across territories

This issue addresses uneven and fragmented access of CCI actors to infrastructures, testing and experimentation facilities, specialised tools, and innovation networks across territories, with disparities persisting between urban and rural areas. These factors all render it difficult to identify and access fit-for-purpose environments. The challenge lies in widening and coordinating access to infrastructures, laboratories, and networks in a way that is inclusive, territorially balanced, and better embedded within local and cross-sectoral innovation ecosystems.

Guiding Question: How can CCIs and its actors gain direct, inclusive, and sustained access to relevant infrastructures, laboratories, ecosystems, and networks needed for innovation?

Aligning funding models with the long-term needs and financial sustainability of CCI infrastructures

This topic tackles the reliance of CCI infrastructures in many cases on public funding and the resulting challenges for long-term sustainability. Smaller CCI actors often face barriers in accessing EU or other funding streams, while available support trends to be short-term and/or misaligned with the operational and capital needs of infrastructures. This creates uncertainty, limits strategic planning, and makes it difficult to develop stable revenue streams or viable business models.

Guiding Question: How can funding models be designed to improve access to finance for CCI infrastructures while supporting their long-term financial sustainability?

Strengthening the role of CCIs as active actors within open, cross-sector and technology-driven innovation ecosystems

CCI infrastructures and actors are often only partially integrated into broader innovation ecosystems. Creative actors and organisations frequently face limited access to intermediaries, technological resources, and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, limiting their participation in innovation processes. Strengthening the role of CCIs involves creating conditions that allow them to be active contributors to open, technology-driven, and cross-sector ecosystems, rather than peripheral participants.

Guiding Question: How can CCIs be more effectively integrated into open innovation ecosystems, including cross-sector collaboration and technological innovation processes?

Improving multi-level governance and coordination to ensure coherent and complementary support for CCI infrastructures

Responsibilities for CCI infrastructures are often fragmented across EU, national, regional, and local levels, and many infrastructures depend on shifting local political priorities. Improving multi-level governance and coordination requires creating mechanisms and strategies that enable coherent, complementary, and long-term support for CCI infrastructure ecosystems.

Guiding Question: How can governance and coordination across policy levels and programmes be improved to support coherent CCI infrastructure ecosystems?