

Cultural heritage institutions within open innovation ecosystems

#Heritage-led Innovation #Social Innovation #Instrumentalisation #Slow Innovation #Experimental Humanities
#Community-embedded #Participatory Practices #Relational Practice #Process-based #Trust #Typology #Ecosystem

01 BACKGROUND

Cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) have traditionally been viewed as **guardians of the past**. Today, their role is expanding as they take a more **active** part in **addressing current societal challenges** and helping to imagine and **shape more inclusive and sustainable futures**. Their close ties to **local communities**, their ability to generate **shared meaning**, and their **infrastructures for learning and dialogue** position them as key players in responding to issues like climate adaptation, social cohesion and democratic participation. At the same time, innovation ecosystems are also changing. They are moving away from a narrow focus on technology and market growth toward more **open, interdisciplinary and socially driven approaches**. In this evolving landscape, CHIs are emerging as important but often **under-recognised actors**. Unlocking their full potential requires **redefining** how innovation is understood, supported and evaluated in policy. It means valuing slow, relational and process-based practices that reflect how change actually happens in heritage work.



Heritage-led innovation is the implementation of a new idea involving heritage that results in an improvement. The basis of the innovation process is new knowledge, which is often an intersecting of disciplines and ideas. The aim of the innovation is creating value or improving existing conditions. The innovation needs to be implemented, put into use or made available for others to use.

Ilucidare, 2019¹

02 CHALLENGES

- **Limited recognition:** CHIs are often excluded from innovation agendas and seen mainly as memory keepers.
- **Misaligned frameworks and indicators:** innovation policies favour speed and scale, overlooking the slow, social nature, and long-term impact of CHIs' work.
- **Structural precarity:** many CHIs face underfunding, staff shortages, and bureaucratic obstacles.
- **Centralisation vs localism:** Centralised policies don't fit local, embedded innovation practices.
- **Siloed systems:** Fragmented policy areas hinder cross-sector collaboration.

03 OPPORTUNITIES

- CHIs are **emerging as strategic actors in social innovation**, evolving beyond traditional roles to become community-embedded spaces that foster learning, reflection, and civic transformation by activating their diverse infrastructures to address complex societal challenges.
- CHIs can **foster cross-sectoral collaboration by bridging traditional policy silos**, serving as equal partners in innovation ecosystems due to their long-term, place-based knowledge and convening capacity.
- It is crucial to **develop meaningful indicators** that go beyond traditional metrics, capturing the transformative, collective, and relational dimensions of heritage-based social innovation and acknowledging long-term impacts.

Why are CHIs relevant for open innovation?

The relation between CHIs and open innovation is two-way:

contribute trust, memory, and long-term vision.
Bring place-based, relational, and care-driven knowledge.
Enrich processes with inclusive, human-centered approaches.

Cultural Heritage Institutions

Open Innovation

offers frameworks and resources for experimentation and reutilisation.
Opens access to partnerships, sustainable models, recognition.
Strenghtens social role and capacity for systemic change.

04 EMERGING CONVERSATIONS AMONG PRACTITIONERS

CHIs, blending physical infrastructure with skill-sharing, co-curation, and speculative inquiry, are transforming into dynamic hubs for heritage, fostering resilient communities and living archives, while navigating mounting pressure to prove their impact through measurable outcomes.

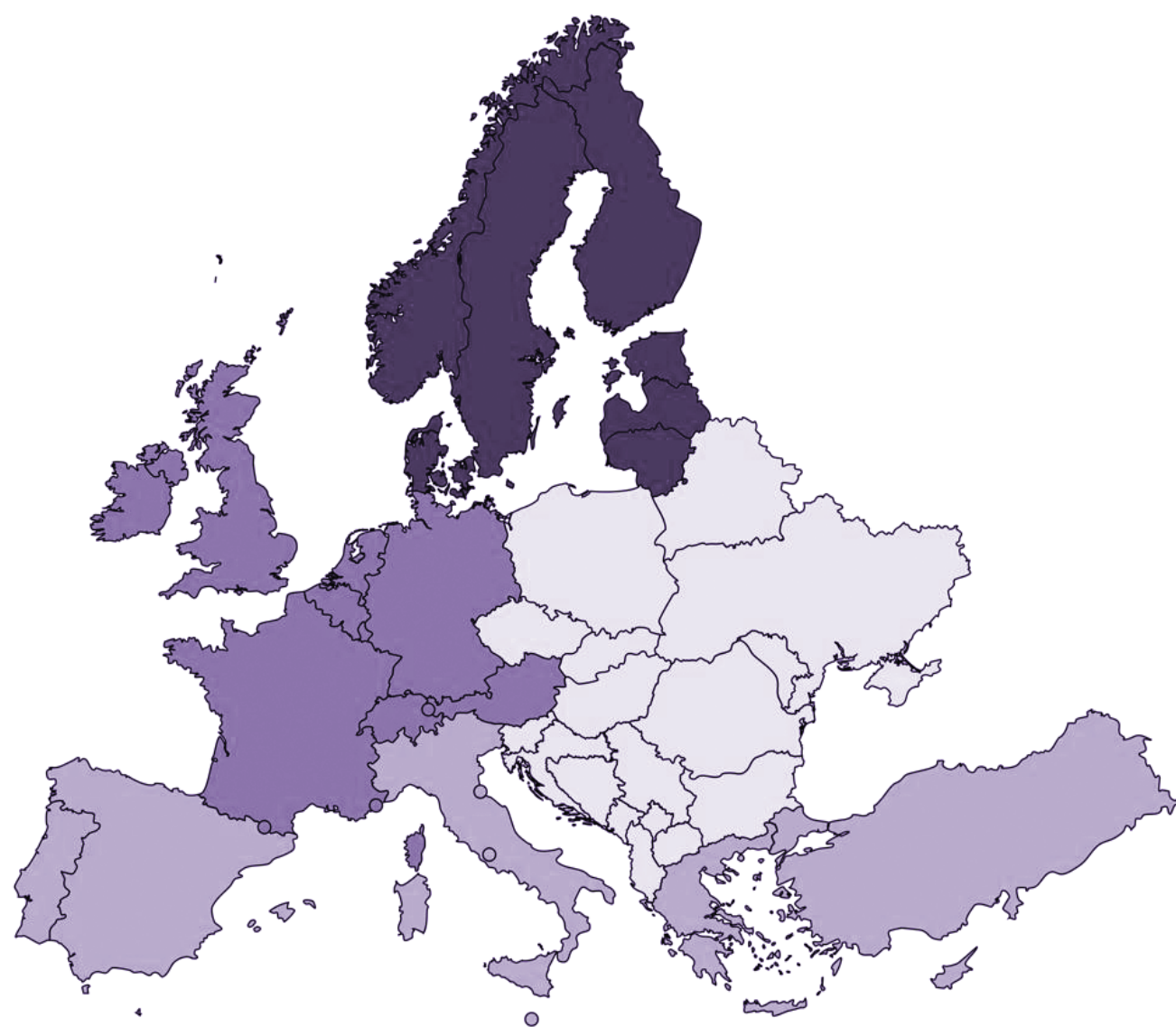
Most affected CCI

- **Cultural Heritage**
- **Architecture**
- **Education**
- **Visual Arts**

Rising conversation in the last 6 months



In which countries are creatives mostly talking about the role of CHIs in innovation practices?



less discussed | more discussed

Regional relevance of conversations regarding the need for CHIs to demonstrate their value through quantifiable outcomes, as funding bodies demand measurable evidence. Data regarding the analysed **ekip** community over the past six months through a social media listening, which maps conversations on platforms available for research access only, does not aim for statistical representativeness, and is part of a broader data collection framework that includes other methods.



A "Possible Museum" is a new way of approaching the institution. It is not only the Museum that could be but [...] also what can be done, the framework of possibilities that open up, yet are still restricted by what already exists. It is neither the avant-garde impulse [...] nor the conservative instinct [...] but the affection with which we can take care of something for its own good, and not only, nor always, to make it grow.

Museum Director, Southern Europe & Turkey



Nantes was among the 10 local good practices selected by the Hub, for its exemplary digital portal Nantes Patrimonia Cultural Heritage 2.0, providing a space for citizens to access & share info about the city's heritage.

Cultural Hub, Europe



[The project] provides an opportunity to learn about traditional agriculture & eating habits, while creating a dialogue between historical & natural heritage.

Heritage Project, Southern Europe & Turkey

05 EXISTING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Policy recommendations | Ilucidare¹

Improve inter-departmental or inter-ministerial mechanisms of coordination between services in charge of heritage and innovation policy.

- Promote capacity building and peer-learning schemes targeting national and local authorities / funding managers to better consider heritage into policy and programs for innovation.
- Review support mechanisms to favour cross-sectorial collaboration between heritage stakeholders (including CHIs, practitioners, and civil society organisations) with other sectors to spur innovation.
- Increase investment to support the development and sustainability of heritage-led innovation beyond public grants.



Recommendations for sustainable collaborations | RECHARGE²

- Integrate participatory methodologies in workflows across an organisation to build sustainable networks of practice and facilitate innovative financing models.
- Prioritise clear and transparent communication that foster open dialogue and lowers barriers to participation.



CHARTER Project's 12 Recommendations | Charter³

Establish skills strategies for the heritage sector for systemic change.

- Counteract the loss of heritage skills.
- Complement core heritage skills with transversal skills to foster inter- and trans-disciplinarity.
- Offer future-focused education and training (E&T).
- Promote a Lifelong Learning area for the heritage sector.
- Foster the recognition of non-formal and informal prior learning.
- Ensure work-based learning for professional development and early-career progression.
- Strengthen quality assurance in heritage education and training.
- Strive towards a viable, diverse heritage workforce.
- Foster professional recognition and facilitate mobility.
- Develop and use robust socio-economic indicators for evidence-based policies.
- Develop intersectoral cross-pollination of heritage knowledge.

06 CASE STUDIES AND RELATED INITIATIVES



The Living Library | Denmark⁴

Based at Dokk1 Library in Aarhus, this initiative **transforms the library into a participatory platform for dialogue and social inclusion**. Inspired by the Council of Europe's Living Library method, it invites people to **"borrow" human books**—real people who share lived experiences. Rooted in heritage as lived memory and civic trust, it fosters empathy, intercultural understanding, and bottom-up innovation within the city's open innovation ecosystem.



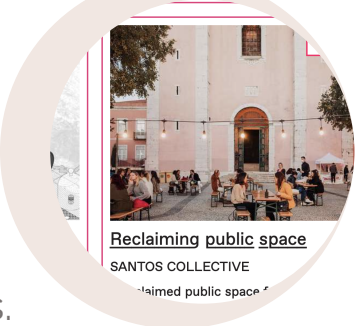
OpenHeritage Hub | Europe⁵

Part of the H2020 OpenHeritage project, this initiative promotes adaptive **reuse of neglected heritage sites through community-led governance**. Local Hubs serve as living labs, linking heritage to social innovation and economic resilience. The model fosters slow, place-based development connecting local knowledge with policy.



EPIC-WE | Europe⁶

EPIC-WE is a HE project empowering youth to engage with culture by **co-creating games based on cultural heritage**. It develops participatory models, design tools, and cross-sector partnerships to activate culture hubs. Heritage becomes a **living resource for civic imagination and digital experimentation**, fostering collaboration, learning, and inclusion within open innovation ecosystems.



Future Architecture Platform | Slovenia⁷

Led by the Museum of Architecture and Design in Slovenia, the platform linked emerging talents with CHIs across Europe. It explored **memory and placemaking** through architecture, fostering **speculative design and inclusive, place-based visions**. As a cultural innovation ecosystem, it supported new models of creative practice and future-oriented narratives.

References:
¹ Ilucidare (2019). *Ilucidare Policy recommendations to promote heritage as a source for innovation and international relations*. Retrieved 24 July 2025, from <https://keanet.eu/wp-content/uploads/Ilucidare-Policy-Recommendations-13092022.pdf>
² RECHARGE (n.d.). *Recommendations for sustainable collaborations*. Retrieved 24 July 2025, from shorturl.at/zzAzV
³ CHARTER (2024). *Securing an innovative and enterprising heritage sector: Twelve transformative recommendations from the CHARTER project*. Retrieved 2 July 2025, from charter-alliance.eu/results
⁴ City of Aarhus (n.d.). *The Living Library*. Retrieved 14 July 2025, from shorturl.at/7YKrB
⁵ OpenHeritage Hub (n.d.). Retrieved 14 July 2025, from openheritage.eu
⁶ EPIC-WE (n.d.). Retrieved 14 July 2025, from epic-we.eu
⁷ Future Architecture Platform (n.d.). Retrieved 14 July 2025, from futurearchitectureplatform.org



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INNOVATION POLICY PLATFORM