EUROPEAN CULTURAL
AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
INNOVATION POLICY PLATFORM

***EKIP* POLICY LAB**

Cultural heritage institutions within open innovation ecosystems

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM POLICY LAB #8

CONTRIBUTORS:
KELLY HAZEJAGER, NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR SOUND & VISION
MUTALENI NADIMI, NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR SOUND & VISION
DR KRISTIINA URB, CREATIVITY LAB
RAGNAR SIIL, CREATIVITY LAB

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon (2021-2027) Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No.101112111

Key Recommendations

Cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) – such as archives, libraries, museums, and heritage sites – have significant potential to act as drivers of innovation and connectors across sectors. They do so by convening diverse communities, translating between different forms of knowledge, and providing trusted spaces where societal challenges can be explored collectively. To realise this potential, policy and funding systems need to better reflect how innovation happens in heritage contexts: gradually, relationally, and through care, collaboration, and community engagement. The recommendations in this report set out a roadmap for strengthening the role of CHIs within open innovation ecosystems by aligning innovation policy, funding, infrastructures, and skills with this broader understanding of innovation.

Cross-cutting priorities:

1. **Develop a shared vision of innovation in heritage.** Policymakers and CHIs should adopt a broader understanding of innovation that values cultural, social, and civic outcomes alongside technological progress. Innovation in CHIs is not only about new tools or products, but about nurturing participation, inclusion, and long-term societal wellbeing.
2. **Foster capacity and motivation to innovate.** Innovation depends on people and institutions that have the skills, resources, and confidence to experiment. Accessible funding, continuous learning opportunities, and sustainable career paths are essential to strengthen both individual and organisational capacity.
3. **Invest in networks and infrastructures for knowledge-sharing.** Innovation in heritage is collective. Investing in digital and physical infrastructures, networks, and Living Labs will help CHIs exchange experiences, co-develop solutions, and build resilient communities of practice.
4. **Encourage and enable cross-sector collaboration.** CHIs should be recognised as equal partners in innovation ecosystems. Cross-sector cooperation (linking culture with education, health, environment, and technology) should be supported through flexible frameworks, shared infrastructures, and incentives for joint projects.
5. **Support the scaling of experiments into innovation and replicable long-term initiatives.** CHIs are involved in many innovative projects, but these rarely scale or continue once initial funding ends. Supporting the transition from one-off experiments to sustainable, replicable initiatives requires long-term and flexible support across funding and financing measures, innovation infrastructures, knowledge-sharing networks, and skills development.

Building block actions:

- **Sustainable competitiveness:** Broaden the definition of innovation to include social and sustainable dimensions; support participatory business models that align cultural and economic value.
- **Regulation and governance:** Adapt legal frameworks and promote co-governance models that share responsibility and enable experimentation.
- **Social dimension:** Mainstream social innovation by embedding inclusion, diversity, and community co-creation at the core of policy design.
- **Research, innovation and technologies:** Create dedicated R&I programmes for CHIs; support practice-based and participatory research that connects culture, technology, and society.
- **Infrastructures:** Treat knowledge-sharing networks and platforms as essential infrastructure for collaboration and innovation.
- **Skills:** Improve working conditions and strengthen innovation literacy through tailored training, fellowships, and cross-sector learning.
- **Investment and funding:** Reform funding schemes to be more flexible, inclusive, and risk-tolerant, with microgrants and long-term support for experimentation.

Cultural heritage institutions should be empowered to act not only as custodians of the past but as active mediators of change by connecting people, knowledge, and values across sectors. By aligning innovation policy with heritage-based practices of care, collaboration, and inclusion, Europe can build more open, resilient, and sustainable innovation ecosystems that reflect its cultural diversity and democratic ambitions.

1 Introduction

Cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) – including museums, archives, libraries, and heritage sites – are increasingly motivated and facing growing expectations to contribute to wider societal goals such as social cohesion, sustainability, and democratic participation. At the same time, they continue to operate within fragile funding systems, rigid institutional structures, and policy frameworks that often overlook their capacity for innovation. While many CHIs already experiment with new ways of engaging communities, using digital tools, and reimagining their public roles, these practices are rarely recognised as part of broader innovation agendas.
Innovation policy in Europe has traditionally focused on technology, science, and market competitiveness. However, recent EU discussions — such as the Council conclusions on cultural and creative sectors as drivers of sustainable innovation (Council of the European Union, 2024) — underline the need to broaden this perspective. Innovation in CHIs happens gradually, relationally, and through dialogue and collaboration. It is not limited to creating new products or services but represents a form of social learning that reshapes institutions, strengthens communities, and connects the past with the future. The challenge, therefore, lies in bridging the gap between emerging policy frameworks and the actual ways in which CHIs generate value and transformation.

Structure and objectives of this document

This document sets out policy recommendations developed through the ekip Policy Lab #8 on **"Cultural heritage institutions within open innovation ecosystems."** Its purpose is to highlight the strategic role of CHIs in driving social and cultural innovation and to provide concrete policy actions to strengthen their position within Europe's innovation landscape.
The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** defines the policy problem, provides the conceptual background and context, and summarises the key challenges identified through the Policy Lab process.
- **Chapter 3** presents the overarching policy vision and objectives.
- **Chapter 4** maps existing EU and national policy measures, projects, and networks relevant to the topic.
- **Chapter 5** outlines policy recommendations, including cross-cutting priorities and detailed actions based on open innovation building blocks.

The Policy Lab process brought together over 90 cultural heritage professionals, policymakers, researchers, and creative sector representatives from across Europe. Through interviews, workshops, and online sessions, participants jointly identified key challenges and proposed actions to enhance the innovation capacity of CHIs. Policy recommendations were drafted based on this input and were subsequently refined in a **Validation Workshop,** where stakeholders discussed their relevance, feasibility, and alignment with existing policy frameworks. This participatory and iterative process ensured that the resulting recommendations reflect the realities and needs of the sector.

The recommendations in this report are structured around ekip's Open Innovation Building Blocks.[1] These building blocks represent distinct but interconnected areas of policy intervention that can be activated to create more inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable innovation.[2] They include:
1. Sustainable competitiveness
2. Regulation and governance
3. Social dimension
4. Research, innovation and technologies
5. Infrastructures
6. Skills
7. Investment and funding

Each block offers specific policy levers that, when combined, enable CHIs to act as active agents of innovation — not only preserving Europe's cultural memory, but shaping its sustainable and democratic future.

2 Policy problem

Cultural heritage institutions are increasingly both internally driven and externally encouraged to contribute to wider societal goals such as social cohesion, sustainability, and democratic participation. This shift reflects the values and missions of many CHIs themselves, as well as expectations from policymakers, funding bodies, and local communities who see heritage as a resource for addressing contemporary challenges (Wilson, 2019; Guttormsen & Swensen, 2017). These expectations come at a time when the whole cultural sector is structurally under-resourced but politically over-demanded. Despite decades of community engagement and care-based practice, CHIs are often absent from innovation policy agendas. They remain framed as custodians of the past, rather than as agents of change (Shepherd, 2023). Many operate within precarious funding models, rigid institutional structures, and disconnected policy silos. The result is a missed opportunity to strengthening their full potential in building more inclusive and participatory futures.

At the centre of the problem lies a mismatch between dominant innovation discourses and the way CHIs innovate. Policymakers often associate innovation with speed, scale, and novelty — such as tech-driven breakthroughs, fast-scaling digital services, or research and innovation programmes that prioritise technological readiness levels, market uptake, and measurable growth indicators. In contrast, heritage professionals describe it as a slow, relational, and situated process. It emerges through trust, dialogue, and experimentation. Many do not even identify themselves as innovators, distancing themselves from technical language like "upskilling" or "transformation". Innovation, in their view, is not a goal but a by-product of engaging with communities and addressing shared problems. For some it is difficult to identify what the difference is between innovation tasks and their main job as heritage managers. Research shows that innovation in CHIs often stems not from the introduction of new technologies, but from sustained co-design processes that reshape institutional mindsets and enable deeper organisational change (Ciolfi et al., 2019,).

[1] See also, https://ekipengine.eu/boosting-innovation-across-sectors-and-borders/
[2] DG GROW, Blueprint for the development of transition pathways, 2022

These tensions have real consequences. Small and community-based institutions are particularly exposed. They face structural barriers like low visibility, lack of access to funding, and unfit metrics that fail to capture the value they generate.[3] Many work without the recognition or resources needed to sustain innovation over time. Their contributions to social wellbeing, civic agency, or environmental awareness are often invisible in standard evaluation systems, which rarely account for the dynamic feedback loops between heritage projects and their socio-cultural contexts (Żbikowska et al., 2024). Some find ways to resist or adapt. But many are forced to conform to models that do not reflect their missions or values. These clashes result in that many CHIs do not wish to enter innovation collaborations or ecosystems, or that other parties do not value their approaches to innovation. Open innovation as an approach to ecosystem building, offers a space where the values driving innovation in CHIs can match with their partners.

> *"CHIs are innovation drivers connecting people, knowledge, and sectors (culture, tech, education, health)."*

CHIs often act as connectors. CHIs do innovate in how they care for, manage and share their collections, but more importantly they bridge policy and practice, local knowledge and expert discourse, memory and experimentation. These roles are essential for building strong innovation ecosystems. Yet they are rarely supported. Intermediary institutions, especially those working in rural or underserved areas, face operational and institutional fragility. They lack space to take risks. They are not treated as strategic partners. Bureaucratic cultures and top-down decision-making structures limit their ability to collaborate across fields or respond to change. The notion of "intermediary institutions" is borrowed from policy fields far removed from culture like manufacturing and industrial innovation, where it has proven essential for understanding how collaboration, experimentation, and knowledge exchange happen across sectors. Recent studies have shown how intermediaries foster trust-building, social capital, and co-created knowledge transfer between actors with divergent cultures and resources (Elavathingal, 2025). Applying this lens to cultural heritage allows us to conceptualise CHIs not just as service providers or venues, but as orchestration nodes that mediate between diverse actors and agendas.

[3] K. Hazejager, 'Working Together for Cultural Heritage, RECHARGE Recommendations for Sustainable Collaboration'.

To tackle these challenges, an open innovation ecosystem approach was adopted.[4] The open innovation approach in the context of *ekip* understands innovation as a collaborative ecosystem rather than the result of isolated organisations. *ekip*'s tools (e.g. the zone model, innovation portfolios, and the LIEPT method) help map how ideas evolve across networks, how actors cooperate, and how capacities develop over time. This approach emphasises collective learning, experimentation, and shared responsibility, highlighting innovation as an ongoing process distributed across multiple stakeholders. This approach shifts the focus from isolated institutions or linear innovation pipelines to the broader networks, relationships, and infrastructures that enable collective problem-solving and long-term transformation (The Good Shift et al., 2024). It allows us to move beyond narrowly defined outputs or competition-based funding models, and to recognise the diversity of actors, roles, and forms of value that characterise heritage innovation. Understanding where and how CHIs operate within these ecosystems, what roles they play, what constraints they face, and what support they need, is a crucial first step towards better recognition. It opens up new possibilities for policymaking that is less about scaling singular solutions and more about cultivating the conditions for collaboration, experimentation, and resilience across contexts.

This Policy Lab examined how to recognise and strengthen the role of CHIs in innovation ecosystems. It explored how policies can support innovation as a social and embedded process. Key questions include: How can we develop better indicators of impact? How do we support community-rooted innovation without imposing standardised models? How can CHIs be empowered as equal partners in accelerating transitions? The goal is to build a more inclusive, open, and sustainable policy framework that values depth over scale and learning over speed.

2.1. DEFINITION AND SCOPE

This document is prepared in line with the Council of the European Union's definition of cultural heritage:

Cultural Heritage

> *"Cultural heritage consists of the resources inherited from the past in all forms and aspects - tangible, intangible and digital (born digital and digitized), including monuments, sites, landscapes, skills, practices, knowledge and expressions of human creativity, as well as collections conserved and managed by public and private bodies such as museums, libraries and archives. It originates from the interaction between people and places through time and it is constantly evolving. These resources are of great value to society from a cultural, environmental, social and economic point of view and thus their sustainable management constitutes a strategic choice for the 21st century."*[5]

Cultural heritage institution (CHI)

> *Cultural heritage institutions play a central role in safeguarding and providing access to Europe's cultural assets. In the context of EU policy, they are defined as organisations that hold permanent collections of works or other subject-matter and make them publicly accessible. This category includes publicly accessible libraries and museums (regardless of the nature of their collections), archives, film or audio heritage institutions, as well as national libraries and national archives. It also extends, where relevant, to the archival or publicly accessible library functions of educational establishments, research organisations and public-sector broadcasting organisations. This broad definition reflects the diversity of institutions that contribute to preservation, access, knowledge-building and innovation within Europe's cultural and creative ecosystems (Directive (EU) 2019/790, 2019).*

[4] Huizingh, E.K.R.E., Open innovation: State of the art and future perspectives. Technovation (2010), doi:10.1016/ j.technovation.2010.10.002

[5] Council Conclusions of 21 May 2014 on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XG0614(08)&from=FR

At the same time, it benefits from the work and definition around heritage and innovation from the ILUCIDARE project.

Heritage-led innovation

> *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. The success of an innovation is determined by the market or larger society, which decide whether an idea or vision is truly new and whether it is an improvement against the current situation.* (ILUCIDARE project, 2020)

2.2. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

This chapter provides a brief overview of how perspectives on cultural heritage and its value in society has shifted over time, considering both perspectives from cultural and innovation policy.

Cultural heritage has increasingly entered the policy spotlight as a catalyst for addressing the social, environmental, and democratic challenges of the 21st century. Traditionally viewed as a domain of conservation, cultural heritage is now recognised for its potential to foster different dimensions of innovation, inclusion, and community resilience. Heritage offers shared spaces and practices through which people can reflect on diverse and sometimes contested histories, negotiate how these shape present-day identities and relationships, and collectively imagine the futures they want to build. By enabling dialogue, meaning-making, and cross-generational learning, cultural heritage helps communities develop the understanding and agency needed to navigate complex societal transitions. Furthermore, cultural heritage collections can be a vast repository for knowledge, ideas, and open datasets, as well as heritage sites can act as testbeds and living labs, playing an important role in place-based innovation. This evolution reflects broader shifts in EU priorities, from economic growth to sustainability, cohesion, and systems-level transformation. In this context, the role of cultural heritage institutions is receiving renewed attention within both cultural and innovation policy agendas.

The relationship between heritage and innovation has developed gradually. In earlier decades, policy for heritage was largely approached through frameworks of preservation (Faro Convention, 2005), education, and tourism. Innovation was framed in technological or economic terms, often disconnected from the social and cultural dimensions of heritage. Local experiments in participatory practice or community engagement existed, but they remained marginal in policymaking and funding strategies. CHIs that tested new models such as ecomuseums[6], citizen-led archives, or experimental libraries were often seen as exceptions rather than structural components of innovation ecosystems. Importantly, the very concept of innovation remains highly contested within the heritage sector and the broader cultural and creative sectors (CCS), where its application can evoke tensions between tradition, values, and market-oriented logics (Wijngaarden et al., 2016).

[6] Ecomuseums are a museological practice that take a collaborative and approach to their organisation, governance, and use of place. For more information see the Ecomuseums network, https://network.ecoheritage.eu/, and the Erasmus+ funded project, EcoHeritage, https://learning.ecoheritage.eu/.

In the 2010s, this began to change. Policy from the European Commission surrounding the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage introduced a broader vision of heritage as a shared responsibility and living resource. Around the same time, Horizon 2020-funded projects such as ILUCIDARE and OpenHeritage framed heritage as a driver of inclusive and place-based innovation, showing how cultural assets, local knowledge, and community participation can be mobilised to co-create solutions that respond to the specific needs, identities, and opportunities of a place. These projects demonstrated that heritage could activate local actors, strengthen social cohesion, and support sustainable development by grounding innovation in the lived reality of communities. Policy debates around the green and digital transitions increasingly cited heritage as a cultural infrastructure capable of supporting long-term transformation. This framing was reinforced by the launch of the New European Bauhaus, which positioned architecture, design, heritage, aesthetics, and sustainability at the centre of the EU's ecological and social ambitions. Similarly, the EIT Culture & Creativity Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC), launched in 2023, further embedded cultural and creative sectors into the EU's innovation agenda offering new frameworks for cross-sector collaboration and entrepreneurship in heritage contexts.

Despite this momentum, structural gaps remain. Many CHIs lack access to funding models that reward slow, embedded, or relational forms of innovation. Evaluation systems continue to prioritise visibility and scalability over long-term impact or community agency. The absence of typologies, shared indicators, and strategic recognition limits how CHIs contribute to broader innovation ecosystems (Fernández Fernández, 2016).

Today, CHIs are increasingly seen as mediators, connectors, and civic infrastructures.[7] Their work addresses climate adaptation, social inclusion, and cultural rights – the right to access, create, participate in, and enjoy culture[8] -, often through collaborative and experimental means. Yet the systems around them are still catching up. This calls for policy approaches that align with the actual practices of heritage-led innovation and that position CHIs not only as guardians of memory but also as enablers of transition, participation, and better futures.

2.3. TRENDS

Insights from social listening carried out by ekip partner Nextatlas, where social media is analysed on the platforms Facebook, Instagram, and X, reveal emerging trends that are reshaping the role of CHIs in open innovation ecosystems.[9] These developments point toward a more participatory, responsive, and socially embedded model of innovation, grounded in local contexts and collective values.

1. Cultural heritage as a platform for local resilience

CHIs are evolving from static repositories into dynamic, community-embedded infrastructures for learning, dialogue, and social innovation. By combining physical spaces with skill-sharing and knowledge exchange, they are becoming vital hubs for collective problem-solving. This shift is particularly active in Central and Eastern Europe, where institutions are reimagining their roles in response to climate change, social fragmentation, and democratic challenges.

2. Participatory and open-ended curation models

Through digital platforms, CHIs are enabling individuals and communities to reinterpret collections and contribute to meaning-making processes. This participatory turn challenges expert-driven narratives and repositions collections as open, evolving ecosystems. In doing so, institutions are not just digitizing heritage but creating new spaces for public agency and intercultural dialogue—particularly around marginalized histories.

[7] Typology of Roles for Cultural Heritage Institutions in Innovation Ecosystems
[8] Mondiacult 2025's definition of 'cultural rights', https://www.unesco.org/en/mondiacult/cultural-rights
[9] To read more about our social listening methodology, https://ekipengine.eu/tools-methods/social-media-listening-analysis-of-ekips-policy-areas/

3. New imaginaries: design fiction and speculative futures

Cultural institutions are increasingly adopting speculative approaches like worldbuilding, future thinking, and design fiction to sustain long-term visions and open-ended innovation processes. Rather than merely preserving the past, CHIs are engaging with "what if" scenarios to anticipate social and environmental futures. These approaches emphasize re-engaging with existing resources to unlock new potential, often emerging organically from within the cultural field.

4. Rethinking value: the metrics dilemma

CHIs are under growing pressure to demonstrate measurable impact, but standard indicators fail to capture the relational, slow, and transformative nature of their work. Institutions are experimenting with alternative evaluation frameworks that reflect community agency, co-creation, and cultural resilience. However, tensions remain between external demands for quantifiable outputs and the sector's embedded, process-oriented practices.

5. Heritage literacy and the search for meaning

Amid societal fragmentation and digital overload, there is renewed public interest in authenticity, memory, and belonging. Folk practices, oral histories, and place-based narratives are being rediscovered as resources for sustainable design and social cohesion. This shift toward "heritage literacy" highlights the role of CHIs in fostering deeper cultural awareness not only preserving the past but anchoring future-oriented action.

6. Cross-sector collaboration as a strategic imperative

CHIs are increasingly collaborating beyond the cultural sector, bringing long-term, place-based knowledge into policy domains such as sustainability, inclusion, and democratic renewal. Their ability to convene diverse stakeholders makes them valuable partners in systemic innovation. Yet, current policy and funding frameworks rarely treat them as strategic co-leaders, underscoring the need for structural change and recognition.

7. Skills and capacity for innovation ecosystems

The shift toward participatory and interdisciplinary work requires new skillsets and institutional cultures. Insights from the CHARTER project emphasise the mismatch between current classification systems (e.g., ISCO, NACE) and the actual diversity of heritage occupations. To fully participate in innovation ecosystems, CHIs need support for cross-cutting skills, hybrid professional profiles, and capacity-building initiatives that legitimise experimental and collaborative practices.

Together, these trends reveal that cultural heritage is not only about safeguarding the past—it is becoming a driver of inclusive, community-rooted innovation. Recognising and supporting this potential will be critical for building more democratic and sustainable innovation ecosystems across Europe.

2.4. OPPORTUNITIES

The cultural heritage sector is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by new expectations, systemic pressures, and emerging forms of public engagement. As heritage institutions reframe their roles within society, opportunities are arising to position them as strategic actors within open innovation ecosystems. These opportunities are not solely technological but involve deeper societal and cultural shifts. Based on extensive interviews, policy dialogues, and ecosystem analysis, three main opportunity areas have been identified:

1. Recognising CHIs as strategic actors in social innovation
2. Fostering cross-sectoral collaboration through heritage-led innovation
3. Developing meaningful indicators to assess cultural and social value

Each of these areas represents a pathway towards a more inclusive, responsive, and systemic approach to innovation for the cultural heritage sector.

1. Recognising CHIs as strategic actors in social innovation

Cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) are increasingly moving beyond their traditional functions of preservation and curation, and emerging as community-embedded spaces for learning, reflection, and civic transformation. In the face of complex societal challenges such as social fragmentation, climate change, and democratic disaffection, CHIs are activating their resources, physical, digital, and relational, to foster collective agency. However, this innovation is often invisible to policy frameworks that remain biased towards technological or market-driven interpretations of change. As interviews revealed, CHIs frequently do not identify themselves as innovation agents, especially when innovation is framed in technical or economic terms. Social innovation in heritage tends to be slow, embedded, and relational —qualities that are difficult to capture through mainstream innovation policy language but are essential for long-term systemic transformation. Bringing social innovation values into technological domains such as reframing AI as a cultural and societal transition, can lead to more inclusive and participatory innovation approaches.

Key focus areas for innovation policy:

- Facilitating self-recognition and capacity-building among CHIs to articulate their contributions within innovation policies and broader transformation agendas.
- Supporting inclusive, participatory approaches such as co-creation, co-ownership, and living labs, that link cultural heritage to collective memory, social repair, and sustainable innovation.
- Aligning innovation policies with heritage-based forms of responsiveness, care, and long-term visioning.
- Facilitating self-recognition and capacity-building among CHIs to articulate their contributions to innovation.
- Promoting leadership models that embed CHIs within local innovation agendas and transitions.
- Promote innovation beyond new business models.
- Encouraging policy frameworks that integrate social innovation values into technological innovation agendas.

2. Fostering cross-sectoral collaboration through heritage-led innovation

Heritage institutions increasingly operate beyond the cultural sector, engaging in issues such as territorial cohesion, demographic change, environmental sustainability, and democratic participation. Despite this, they are rarely treated as equal partners in innovation policy or ecosystem design. Structural silos between policy domains (e.g., culture, innovation, and social policy) prevent the recognition of the civic and strategic value CHIs offer. Their long-term, place-based knowledge and convening capacity make them vital contributors to systemic innovation bringing cultural depth and social meaning to otherwise technocratic or market-led processes. This collaborative potential remains underdeveloped and underfunded. Instead of being seen as passive repositories or communication tools, CHIs should be acknowledged and supported as co-leaders in ecosystem transitions, with the ability to bridge sectors and shape cross-disciplinary agendas.

> *"Innovation in heritage is slow, relational, and community-driven - not just tech or products."*

Key focus areas for innovation policy:

- Developing policy frameworks that position CHIs as equal actors in cross-sectoral innovation partnerships.
- Encouraging collaboration between CHIs and sectors such as education, urban development, public health, and environmental planning.
- Building peer-learning networks and horizontal exchanges between communities, institutions, and practitioners.
- Supporting experimentation spaces that facilitate cross-sector dialogue, trust-building, and relational governance.
- Providing incentives for co-produced projects that integrate cultural heritage into broader policy agendas.
- Support flexible funding to support CHIs as key players in innovation across different sectors and areas of society.

3. Developing meaningful indicators to assess cultural and social value

Cultural heritage institutions face increasing pressure to demonstrate their impact through quantifiable metrics. Yet the dominant indicators, focused on growth, visibility, and audience size fail to reflect the transformative, collective, and relational dimensions of heritage-based innovation. Without better tools, funding and policy will continue to favour conventional, low-risk and short-term projects, marginalising the systemic potential of heritage institutions. Interviewees stressed the need for metrics that acknowledge the pace, complexity, and embeddedness of social innovation. Many impacts such as community empowerment, knowledge co-production, or intergenerational dialogue, unfold over long periods and resist reductive measurement. Additionally, because social innovation is deeply embedded in local contexts, many of its outcomes are shaped by variables beyond the control of the institution itself. However, these external challenges are also internal opportunities for heritage institutions to intervene, adapt, and lead systemic change. One way to address this is through the use of innovation portfolios, which allow institutions to take a long-term, strategic view of impact, connecting diverse initiatives that collectively contribute to systemic change.

1. A complex relationship between heritage and innovation

Cultural heritage institutions are traditionally seen as protectors of the past, not as laboratories for the future. This creates tension with mainstream innovation policies that usually focus on technology, rapid growth, and market success. In contrast, CHIs innovate in slower and more relational ways by reusing knowledge, preserving skills, and creating new social or cultural value from what already exists. This kind of "retro-innovation" is just as important, but it is often invisible in current innovation frameworks. Many institutions therefore do not see themselves as innovators, even though their daily work already contributes to change and learning. The misalignment between innovation policy and CHI practices raises a key question for policymakers: How can innovation frameworks evolve to embrace slower, participatory, and socially oriented forms of transformation?

2. Narrow understandings of impact

Many funding and evaluation systems still measure success in terms of numbers (e.g. visitors, visibility, or income) rather than in terms of what CHIs do best: building trust, supporting inclusion, and strengthening communities. These narrow measures of impact risk turning innovation into short-lived events rather than supporting deeper, long-term transformation inside organisations. As a result, the broader public value that heritage institutions create often goes unrecognised. One interviewee noted that private funders are happy to pay for restoration plaques, but not for experimentation or inclusion work. Another pointed to the invisibility of everyday innovation because it resists the language of "transformation" or "upskilling". This raises a critical challenge: how can funding and evaluation systems be reformed to capture the value of trust-building, local collaboration, and community agency?

3. Limited access to innovation infrastructures

Innovation support and funding are not equally accessible. Many CHIs, especially small or community-based ones, face language barriers, administrative complexity, and high competition when applying for European projects. Participation often requires significant resources, technical skills, and English-language proficiency, which smaller institutions may lack. This leaves them disconnected from larger networks and infrastructures that could help them learn, share, and innovate together. While EU-level initiatives can offer visibility and support, they risk becoming disconnected from lived realities when they prioritise abstract goals or universal templates. The policy implication is supporting heritage-based innovation requires decentralised infrastructures, peer learning platforms, and policy frameworks that treat CHIs as place-based intermediaries, not peripheral implementers.

4. Precarious funding and unstable working conditions

Most heritage institutions rely on project-based funding, which provides short-term resources but little long-term security. Staff often work on temporary contracts or volunteer arrangements, limiting their ability to plan, experiment, or build professional careers. This instability discourages risk-taking and makes innovation dependent on individual energy rather than institutional strategy. Sustainable innovation requires stable funding, fair working conditions, and room for long-term thinking.

> *"CHIs need better support, flexible funding, skills development, and sustainable career paths."*

5. Few ways to scale and sustain innovation

Even when successful, innovative projects rarely continue beyond their initial funding. There are few mechanisms that help institutions to share what works, adapt ideas to different contexts, or secure ongoing financial support. Without models for scaling and learning, many valuable experiments fade away once a project ends, preventing wider benefits for the sector. Interviewees called for greater recognition of the diversity and specificity of local ecosystems, as well as for more horizontal networks of exchange across Europe.

6. Limited organisational capacity and leadership

In many CHIs, innovation depends on a few motivated individuals rather than being embedded in the organisation's structure and vision. Few institutions have dedicated innovation teams, and leadership often prioritises preservation and compliance over experimentation. As a result, innovation remains peripheral, something done "in addition to" regular work instead of being part of the institutional culture.

7. Collaboration challenged by competition and inequalities

Working together across sectors and disciplines usually produces better results. However, competition for scarce funding often discourages collaboration. Power imbalances between large, well-funded organisations and smaller, local ones make partnerships uneven. Building trust, sharing knowledge, and recognising each other's strengths takes time, skills, and supportive frameworks that are still lacking. Many heritage-led projects operate through informal, locally grounded partnerships that respond to community needs. These collaborations between museums and social services, libraries and migrant organisations, archives and youth groups, generate public value but often fall outside the scope of traditional innovation frameworks. Policies and funding instruments tend to favour formalised consortia or tech-oriented agendas, making it harder for CHIs to initiate or sustain collaborative work with actors from other fields.

In summary, these challenges show that while cultural heritage institutions already contribute significantly to social and cultural innovation, they operate in systems that do not fully recognise or support this role. A new approach is needed, one that values slow, community-rooted forms of innovation; provides stable and flexible funding; and builds infrastructures that enable collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and long-term learning across the sector.

There is a structural misalignment between how innovation happens on the ground and how it is framed institutionally. Fragmented policy domains and sector-specific funding criteria discourage integrated approaches, even as societal challenges require precisely such coordination.

A more coherent policy framework would:

- Prioritise funding mechanisms that support partnerships across culture, education, social policy, and sustainability.
- Recognise CHIs as civic infrastructures capable of enabling local innovation through trust, continuity, and place-based knowledge.
- Support intermediary roles and brokering functions that translate between sectors, timelines, and institutional logics.

2.6. PROBLEM STATEMENTS

1. Rethinking innovation frameworks for cultural heritage institutions

Innovation in the cultural heritage sector is often framed through narrow lenses emphasising novelty, scale, and digitization, while overlooking the embedded, iterative, and relational nature of innovation as experienced by many institutions. Heritage-led innovation frequently takes the form of updating missions, reactivating social functions, or experimenting with new forms of participation. However, current policy frameworks and evaluation systems rarely reflect these slower, learning-based processes. There is a growing gap between policy expectations for innovation and the operational realities of local institutions. The emphasis on quantifiable outcomes such as audience growth or digital transition marginalizes efforts rooted in community-building, inclusion, and experimentation. Without reform, policy agendas risk creating a misalignment that discourages real innovation on the ground.

How can innovation frameworks be adapted to recognize and support the diverse, place-based and relational innovation practices of cultural heritage institutions?

2. Structural precarity as a barrier to innovation

Across the sector, many cultural heritage institutions, particularly smaller or citizen-led ones, operate in conditions of structural precarity. Limited funding, rigid public ownership structures, and bureaucratic barriers hinder their ability to sustain experimentation or develop long-term strategies. Public-private asymmetries exacerbate the problem, as some flexible private institutions can innovate more easily while others depend on complex public systems that limit agility. Precarity also affects staff, undermining career pathways and reducing diversity in professional profiles, which in turn limits institutional renewal. Reports such as Stakeholder Analysis (ILUCIDARE project, 2019) stress that fragmented funding and weak employment conditions are major obstacles to institutional innovation. Without changes in the regulatory and financial ecosystem, innovation will remain unsustainable and exclusionary.

How can cultural policy address institutional fragility and employment precarity to unlock innovation capacity across the sector? It's important to keep in mind what is under control for the Cultural Heritage Institutions and focus on the policy challenges in which they have influence.

3. Inadequate indicators and impact measurement

Current systems for evaluating innovation in cultural heritage often fail to capture its true value and dynamics. Metrics are typically derived from growth-based or product-oriented models, prioritizing efficiency, scale, or digital outputs. Yet many innovation practices in heritage institutions involve social processes, collective learning, or identity building outcomes that are difficult to quantify through standard indicators. This creates a mismatch between what institutions do and what is considered valuable in funding and evaluation terms. As noted in Dynamics and future scenarios for the cultural heritage sector (Charter Project, 2024), mainstream evaluation logics remain poorly suited to the sector's cyclical, long-term, and context-specific dynamics. Without more adequate tools to assess innovation beyond audience data or digital presence, many impactful initiatives remain invisible to funders and policymakers.

What new indicators or methodologies are needed to assess innovation in heritage in ways that reflect social value, relational dynamics, and long-term transformation?

4. Tensions between centralised agendas and local innovation ecosystems

Many heritage institutions operate within decentralised, community-based ecosystems that prioritise responsiveness, participation, and local partnerships. Yet policy and funding systems often favour centralised models that impose rigid criteria or overly bureaucratic procedures. European initiatives, while ambitious, can be energy-intensive and ill-suited to small institutions with limited administrative capacity. This creates an asymmetry that stifles bottom-up innovation and concentrates opportunity among larger players. There is a growing recognition of the need to decentralise innovation support and to foster horizontal exchange between institutions of different sizes. Experiences from rural or peripheral contexts show that local anchoring and peer learning can yield sustainable, replicable practices. However, these remain under-supported.

How can European cultural policy better support distributed innovation through more accessible, decentralised, and flexible governance models?

5. The overlooked role of heritage in social innovation

Cultural heritage plays a significant yet under acknowledged role in driving social innovation. Institutions that engage with marginalised groups, foster new forms of participation, or help build collective identity are performing critical social functions. Yet these contributions often remain invisible in dominant policy narratives, which still prioritise economic value, tourism, or technological transformation. Heritage is rarely framed as a solution space in broader social policy, despite evidence of its potential to foster cohesion, recognition, and inclusion. The European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (2018) calls for more integrated approaches, but concrete mechanisms remain limited. If heritage's role in social innovation continues to be overlooked, opportunities for joined-up policy and cross-sector collaboration will be lost.

How can the cultural heritage sector be more fully integrated into social innovation policy agendas at regional, national, and European levels?

3 Policy vision

Cultural Heritage Institutions hold a largely untapped potential as strategic actors in innovation. Yet, our interviews with museum directors, librarians, archivists, and heritage managers reveal a widespread hesitation to identify their work as innovative. Most heritage practitioners do not see themselves as contributors to innovation agendas unless the conversation shifts to notions of more open, social, and civic innovation. They begin to describe how they co-create with communities, build new social relations, prototype ideas, and contribute to systemic change, most likely without naming it as such.

This disconnect signals a deeper issue. There is a gap between how innovation is practiced on the ground and how it is recognised at the policy level. At the same time, interviews with innovation experts and consultants confirm that heritage can and should play a central role in broader innovation ecosystems. Hence pointing that a shift in policy frameworks is needed. One that expands the definition of innovation to include social, cultural, and care-based practices, and positions CHIs as vital contributors to just and sustainable futures.

This vision builds on the spirit of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage and its message, **"Our heritage: where the past meets the future,"** by affirming the role of CHIs as drivers of inclusive, forward-looking societal transformation.

This vision does not underestimate the structural precarity of the sector nor the chronic challenges faced by small and large institutions alike, whether public or private, for-profit or not-for-profit. It acknowledges the fragile conditions under which many CHIs operate. Yet, it argues that these challenges must be addressed not with marginal fixes but through stronger frameworks, better tools, and more adaptive funding opportunities. This vision is not positioned in denial of those limitations, but as a way to confront and overcome them by affirming the strategic role of CHIs in shaping more inclusive, resilient, and innovative societies. This requires moving beyond the oft-repeated refrain heard throughout the interviews *"we innovate to survive"* toward a paradigm where CHIs are empowered to innovate by design, not by necessity.

3.1. OBJECTIVES

Drawing from literature and interviews conducted for this document, the following objectives were developed to engage stakeholders in the policy lab process, and define a renewed policy vision for cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) within open innovation ecosystems:

- The value and opportunities that CHIs contribute to innovation through cultural, social, and civic means are recognised across innovation, cultural, and broader public policy frameworks.
- Data on the activities, roles, and impacts of CHIs are systematically collected and made actionable to support strategic planning, funding decisions, and policy development especially in cross-sectoral contexts such as education, climate, digitalisation, and territorial development.
- Innovation objectives for CHIs go beyond narrow digitalisation efforts, embracing a more ambitious and systemic approach that includes social repair, community empowerment, and institutional transformation.
- Structural barriers that limit CHIs from actively participating in innovation ecosystems such as underfunding, siloed governance, and narrow evaluation systems are identified and addressed through dedicated instruments, funding streams, and capacity-building efforts.

3.2. STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

The interviews conducted revealed a series of recurring needs, tensions and aspirations shared by professionals across the cultural heritage sector. Despite operating in highly diverse contexts, from large private foundations to rural community museums, participants voiced common concerns about the conditions in which innovation becomes possible, recognised, and sustainable. These needs are not abstract policy recommendations, but grounded reflections that emerge directly from lived experience. Each one is supported by a direct quote from the interviews and organised into three broad categories:

1. Institutional conditions
2. Social and cultural dimensions
3. Evaluation and recognition mechanisms

3.2.1. INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS FOR INNOVATION

Recognise failure as part of the process

> *"Innovation is an error-based process. We must allow institutions to fail. How do you want to innovate if you are not allowed to fail? How do we translate this into policy?" - Innovation expert*

Adapt legal and operational frameworks to institutionalise complexity

> *"We have three different founders in our museum: local administration, cultural ministry and city art centers. Each of them wants different things from us... Heritage institutions tend to be like this. Very multifaceted. We are an ecosystem by ourselves. Our business model is quite complex, from renting spaces to participating in European projects to research and innovation, etc."*
>
> *- Research manager at a museum*

Provide accessible and small-scale funding for decentralised initiatives

> *"Too many barriers to receive European funding... We must facilitate the life of small entities. Even if they are small. Micro-fundings... 5000-10000 euros can make a big difference and spark innovation processes."*
>
> *—Heritage network manager*

Improve working conditions and career paths for heritage professionals

> *"If you want to innovate in Cultural Heritage Institutions you need new people coming in... but as long as the work conditions keep being precarious... you will have the same professional profile as ever... Limited career prospects hinder innovation."*
>
> *— EU project coordinator*

Recognise that innovation depends on prepared ecosystems, not isolated efforts

> *"Innovation cannot happen by itself. It needs a lot of previous work... There must be an ecosystem already in place... If you are not ready, you will not be able to catch opportunities."*
>
> *— Heritage expert*

3.2.2. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF INNOVATION

Embrace innovation as a process of care, continuity and institutional learning

> *"Innovation for libraries is not about finding new activities, new business models or new functionalities… It's about updating activities, business models and functionalities."*
>
> *— Innovation expert*

Involve marginalised communities as drivers of institutional innovation

> *"If you want to innovate in a museum, library, archives, etc., bring marginalised people into the institution and you will have innovation. Bring migrant people, homeless people, sex workers, etc... Then you will have innovation. Innovation is outside the institution."*
>
> *— Heritage and social innovation expert*

Acknowledge the reality of fragmented, project-based collaboration ecosystems

> *"We are more comfortable working in a project-based relation than with long-term partnerships. Our ecosystem is based in project-based collaborations. We feel that we maximise more our efforts"*
> *— Museum Manager*

3.2.3. EVALUATION AND RECOGNITION MECHANISMS

Develop indicators that reflect social impact and organisational transformation

> *"Innovation impact in heritage is always reduced to audience enlargement and diversification because it's the easiest indicator. We need to go beyond this."*
>
> *— Museum manager*

Support CHIs as connectors and ecosystem builders

> *"Most important is to have communication spaces between local heritage institutions, local population and local finance opportunities."*
>
> *— Heritage network manager*

There are other EU-funded projects that have identified stakeholder needs at the intersection of cultural heritage and innovation. Given the scale and scope of these initiatives, their findings tend to focus on more structural and high-level needs across sectors. If you wish to explore these perspectives further, the ILUCIDARE and CHARTER projects offer particularly insightful frameworks and analyses.

4 Policy and project mapping

EU Research & Innovation (R&I) portfolio

European research programmes have played a decisive role in repositioning cultural heritage as a vector for innovation, sustainability, and societal transformation. Through Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, the EU has not only scaled up investment in heritage-related R&I but has also begun to cultivate an open innovation ecosystem where cultural heritage institutions are increasingly recognised as key actors. These programmes have supported collaborative, cross-sectoral approaches that go beyond preservation, exploring how heritage can generate social, economic, and ecological value.

Horizon 2020, in particular, marked a shift towards this broader framing and introducing new concepts such as the quintuple helix model for innovation (ILUCIDARE project). Although it is still too early to fully measure the long-term impact of these programmes on the heritage sector, their influence is already visible in the emergence of experimental projects, interdisciplinary networks, and participatory models of governance. Horizon Europe builds on this momentum with an even stronger emphasis on sustainability, inclusion, and digital transformation, setting the stage for cultural heritage to shape future-oriented, democratic innovation across Europe.

Horizon 2020 (2014-2020)

Horizon 2020 marked a turning point for cultural heritage within the EU's research and innovation agenda. With over €500 million allocated to heritage-related projects throughout its duration, it significantly expanded both the volume of funding and the number of topics covered. However, despite this increase, the programme often reproduced earlier thematic and disciplinary divisions—separating tangible, intangible, digital, and natural heritage rather than embracing the integrated and dynamic nature of cultural heritage as conceptualised in recent policy frameworks. The programme's Societal Challenge 6 (SC6) introduced a wide array of heritage-relevant calls between 2017 and 2020. These included themes related to cultural tourism, creative industries, cultural policy, endangered heritage, and the role of collaborative approaches in fostering social cohesion. Digital heritage also featured prominently. Yet, the fragmentation across research pillars and the lack of a coherent heritage research agenda limited the full exploitation of this investment. The need for a holistic, interdisciplinary, and impact-oriented research framework aligned with societal, cultural, and ecological challenges—emerged as a key lesson from this phase.

ILUCIDARE: Connecting Heritage, Innovation and Diplomacy

A flagship project in this space was ILUCIDARE, the first major initiative to apply the quintuple helix model to cultural heritage-led innovation. Bringing together academia, public institutions, businesses, civil society, and environmental actors, ILUCIDARE redefined heritage as a strategic driver of innovation and international cooperation. Its outputs—such as the ILUCIDARE Innovation Handbook, training modules, stakeholder analysis and Special Prizes—established practical frameworks and international networks that continue to inspire heritage-based innovation and diplomacy.

CultureLabs: Recipes for Social Innovation

CultureLabs tackled the challenge of activating cultural heritage as a tool for social inclusion. The project co-designed participatory methodologies referred to as "recipes" to empower marginalised communities, particularly immigrants and refugees, in collaboration with museums, civil society organisations, and policy stakeholders. By treating culture as a shared resource and experimenting with new forms of engagement, CultureLabs offered replicable models for inclusive cultural programming.

ROCK: Regeneration Through Cultural Heritage

Focusing on urban environments, the ROCK project developed a collaborative and circular systemic approach to the adaptive reuse and regeneration of historic city centres. ROCK linked cities, universities, and cultural institutions through living labs, digital platforms, and knowledge exchange mechanisms. Its emphasis on environmental sustainability, public participation, and cultural heritage as a resource for city branding positioned it as a model for innovation-led urban transformation.

ARCHES: Accessible Cultural Heritage for All

Inclusion was also at the heart of the ARCHES project, which aimed to make cultural heritage accessible to people with cognitive, sensory, and communication difficulties. Through participatory design and the application of emerging technologies such as augmented reality, avatars, and tactile guides ARCHES demonstrated how museums and cultural institutions can reimagine engagement and learning experiences for a wider audience.

eHERITAGE: Advancing Virtual Heritage Research

Finally, the eHERITAGE project worked to enhance European research capacity in virtual reality applications for cultural heritage. By connecting leading institutions across Romania, Italy, and Slovenia, it built a centre of excellence in virtual heritage and explored innovative ways to digitally preserve, interpret, and disseminate Europe's cultural assets. The project laid important groundwork for the development of immersive, user-centred approaches to cultural heritage interpretation.

Together, these projects reflect the growing recognition of heritage as a field of innovation, social, technological, and institutional. They illustrate a sector in transformation, engaging with digital technologies, participatory governance, and sustainability. At the same time, they underline the need for more integrated, long-term, and interdisciplinary approaches, something Horizon Europe is now beginning to address more coherently.

Horizon Europe (2021-2027)

Cultural heritage is recognised as one of the three core areas of intervention in the programme's Cluster 2: Culture, Creativity, and Inclusive Society, which supports research and innovation (R&I) addressing culture, creativity, and inclusive societies. The programme frames cultural heritage not only as an asset for digitisation and preservation, but as a driver of sustainable innovation, societal cohesion, and European identity. Among the expected impacts are the enhancement of cultural governance, wider access to heritage, and the positioning of Europe as a leader in conservation technologies and creative industries. However, despite this ambitious framing, there is no planned European Partnership to institutionalise this impact, limiting long-term coordination and support.

The programme's language often emphasises digitisation, tourism, and economic competitiveness, while more systemic and social dimensions of heritage innovation remain less developed. Nevertheless, several funded projects under Cluster 2 point to a growing interest in place-based, participatory and cross-sectoral approaches that align with the broader vision of heritage as a vector for relational and democratic innovation.

Participatory Management and Sustainable Governance in Cultural Institutions

One of the most conceptually promising calls of the first Horizon Europe Work Programme (2021–2022) was HORIZON-CL2-2021-HERITAGE-01-02, which focused on exploring new participatory and financially sustainable models for cultural institutions, particularly museums, libraries, and archives. Projects funded under this call are pioneering commons-oriented, value co-creation, and living lab approaches, critical to reframing innovation in heritage as a social and democratic process, not merely a technological one.

GLAMMONS – Cultural Commons and Participatory GLAMs

The GLAMMONS project reimagined Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAMs) as commons-oriented institutions grounded in co-creation, openness and accessibility. It examined community-led initiatives—neighbourhood archives, local museums, oral histories—that are emerging across Europe and envisioned them as engines of social cohesion and justice. The project fostered digital and social innovation by developing toolkits, MOOCs, podcasts, and open training resources for professionals and communities alike. Its approach represents a bottom-up alternative to traditional institutional models, rooted in care, participation and inclusion.

LibrarIN – Co-Creation and Social Innovation in Libraries

LibrarIN exploredthe transformative potential of co-creation and social innovation within public libraries by designing and testing new models of service delivery where individual and societal values are co-constructed. The project developed a comprehensive theoretical framework for value co-creation, tracked innovation through an online benchmarking tool, and informed library policy with empirical evidence and scalable solutions. By embedding innovation in the everyday practices of libraries, LibrarIN advanced a civic-centred vision of these institutions as democratic and dynamic social infrastructures.

RECHARGE – Living Labs for Participatory Business Models

RECHARGE (Resilient European Cultural Heritage As Resource for Growth and Engagement) supported participatory business models for cultural institutions, linking community participation to financial sustainability. Through a network of Cultural Heritage Living Labs, the project co-designed strategies for resource diversification, public engagement, and sustainable development. It explicitly connected economic resilience with openness and inclusion, positioning community engagement not only as a social value but also as a key resource for institutional viability in both digital and onsite environments.

IN SITU – Place-Based Innovation in Non-Urban Areas

Under the call HORIZON-CL2-2021-HERITAGE-01-03, the IN SITU project explores how cultural and creative industries (CCIs) can act as drivers of innovation in non-urban and peripheral regions. It combines research with experimental actions to map and foster the socio-economic contributions of CCIs and their capacity to generate cross-sectoral spill-overs. Its work on policy alignment, innovation mentoring, and local project incubation exemplifies the kind of ecosystemic logic often missing from heritage innovation agendas. IN SITU demonstrates that heritage-led innovation must be understood through place-specific logics and distributed capacities, rather than centralised technological interventions alone.

EPIC-WE and LoGaCulture – Games, Youth and Cultural Participation

The call HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-09 foregrounds the intersection between games and cultural heritage. The EPIC-WE project harnesses game-making as a tool for civic engagement, empowering young people to co-create digital experiences rooted in European cultural values. The initiative connects cultural institutions, higher education, creative sectors, and young citizens through collaborative "cultural game jams", positioning game design as a medium for participatory heritage creation.

In parallel, LoGaCulture investigates locative games—digital experiences triggered by physical locations—to deepen engagement with heritage sites. While technically focused, the project also critiques the fragmentation and experimental fragility of this subfield, calling for sustainable deployment models that can be embedded within institutional structures and supported by existing staff.

ARACNE – Reweaving the European Silk Innovation Ecosystem

ARACNE revives Europe's silk heritage not only as a cultural legacy but as a vehicle for innovation and regional development. The project proposes a European Silk Route, linking local production hubs across the continent into a multi-level, bottom-up innovation ecosystem. Bringing together academia, industry, civil society and public actors, ARACNE uses cultural heritage to drive new economic models, creative production, and sustainability. It exemplifies the potential of material heritage to act as a connector between tradition and forward-looking innovation strategies.

CULTURATI – Customised Games and Routes for Cultural Heritage and Arts

CULTURATI proposes a global content platform that engages users with cultural heritage through interactive games and smart visitor routing. Combining human-centred design and technologies such as AI, IoT, and cloud computing, the project addresses overcrowding, accessibility, and audience engagement. With five pilot sites, CULTURATI reflects a new generation of digital cultural services—aiming to balance preservation with experience, and local identity with global access. While heavily tech-driven, its collaborative approach between CCIs, cultural institutions, and the public hints at a more integrated cultural-educational ecosystem.

Work programme (2023-2025)

The 2023–2025 work programme introduces a more critical and reflective perspective on innovation and digitisation in heritage. The call *HORIZON-CL2-2023-HERITAGE-01-03: Re-visiting the digitisation of cultural heritage: What, how and why?* signals a conceptual shift, reassessing not just the technological affordances of digitisation, but really focusing on its societal, legal, ethical, and inclusivity dimensions.

DIGICHer – Digitisation of Cultural Heritage of Minority Communities

DIGICHer focuses on equity and inclusiveness in digitising the cultural heritage of minority communities (the Sámi, Jewish and Ladin peoples, among others). It challenges mainstream digitisation practices by foregrounding user-centric design, ethical governance, and culturally respectful reuse of digital assets. The project proposes a validated, scalable framework that supports democratic cultural participation, aiming to reduce risks of digital misuse and promote long-term stewardship that reflects plural European worldviews.

IMPULSE – Immersive Digitisation for Cultural Revival

IMPULSE aims to upcycle cultural heritage through immersive technologies, fostering XR-based storytelling, audience engagement, and capacity-building for creative sectors. It also tackles legal and ethical barriers to immersive reuse of cultural content, highlighting the need for new frameworks around intellectual property, interoperability, and social inclusion. The project brings together artists, institutions, researchers, and creative industries to co-create strategies for sustainable use of digital heritage in immersive and metaverse environments.

REEVALUATE – Towards Collaborative and Democratic Digitisation

REEVALUATE adopts a systemic approach to the entire cultural heritage digitisation lifecycle, integrating human-centred design, AI tools, and citizen engagement. The project develops a modular framework to manage the process from asset selection to creative reuse, grounded in the actual needs of stakeholders. Among its key contributions are participatory contextualisation that centres marginalised voices, AI-based tools to facilitate the reuse of heritage assets and connect them with creative actors, and governance protocols for digital rights management using NFT and distributed ledger technologies. By advancing creative reuse, accessibility, and civic co-ownership, REEVALUATE repositions digitisation as a means of generating societal value rather than merely a technical exercise.

The PITCH Project. Heritage and green transition

The PITCH project explores how cultural heritage can support ecological and energy transitions. It examines Europe's petrocultural legacies—visible in museums, industrial sites, and energy landscapes and reinterprets them to foster citizen trust in green futures. Through participatory approaches, PITCH offers tools for policymakers and practitioners to rethink heritage in light of climate challenges. By making fossil-fuel heritage legible and usable, the project promotes a systemic view of innovation where cultural heritage is not only preserved but mobilised as a driver of just and sustainable transformation.

The Cultural Heritage Cloud or "European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage" (ECCCH)

The European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage (ECCCH) is an EU-driven initiative designed to create a shared digital environment that connects cultural heritage institutions and professionals across Europe. Its aim is to improve access to advanced digital tools, harmonised metadata standards and efficient workflows for digitising, preserving and sharing cultural heritage collections. The origins of the ECCCH lie in the European Commission's commitment to strengthen cooperation, digital capacity and data interoperability within the cultural heritage sector, responding to long-standing fragmentation and unequal access to digital infrastructures. The ECCCH is closely linked to the Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage (CEDS-CH), one of the EU's domain-specific data spaces that supports cross-border data sharing, reuse and innovation, particularly around high-quality digital cultural heritage resources such as 3D models, digitised artefacts and research metadata. Together, the ECCCH and the CEDS-CH create a more connected, interoperable and digitally empowered cultural heritage ecosystem across the European Union.

Complementary EU programmes

Creative Europe

Creative Europe supports a wide range of networks essential for strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration among heritage institutions. Networks such as Europa Nostra, Culture Action Europe (CAE), the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH), the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO), and Future for Religious Heritage (FRH) serve as critical actors in Europe's cultural and creative ecosystems. These networks not only facilitate peer learning and channel funding opportunities but also help build shared standards, capacities, and narratives across the sector. By promoting a shared language for innovation and sustainability, they strengthen institutional cooperation and visibility. However, their concentration in English and centralised structures can sometimes limit accessibility for smaller or more locally embedded institutions.

Erasmus +

Erasmus+ contributes significantly to the heritage sector by fostering mobility, peer-to-peer learning, and the exchange of knowledge across European institutions. It supports cultural professionals, students, and educators in developing the skills and partnerships needed to engage with broader innovation processes. For heritage institutions, Erasmus+ offers powerful tools to strengthen international collaboration, test participatory models, and support long-term institutional development through shared learning. Programmes like the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters further enhance this impact by promoting interdisciplinary curricula that bridge heritage, sustainability, innovation, and cultural management, cultivating a new generation of professionals equipped to work across sectors and borders.

Interreg

The Interreg programme funds numerous cross-border projects where cultural heritage serves as a bridge for cooperation, regional cohesion, and local development. These initiatives often involve transnational partnerships between municipalities, museums, civil society organisations, and cultural sites, promoting territorial innovation through cultural heritage. Interreg's emphasis on regional collaboration aligns closely with the open innovation ethos by encouraging place-based, participatory approaches and strengthening local ownership of heritage-led regeneration and sustainability efforts. For example, HeriTION, an Interreg project, promotes inclusive and sustainable management of cultural heritage in natural protected areas. Building on previous initiatives like Innocastle and Share, it fosters collaboration between public and private actors and actively involves local communities. The project links cultural and natural assets with tourism strategies and supports policy improvement in key areas such as digitisation, participation, innovative financing, and accessibility. HeriTION offers a holistic model to balance heritage use and conservation, strengthening innovation, resilience and community ownership.

> *"Build networks & infrastructures - living labs, platforms, and knowledge-sharing systems to collaborate."*

4.1. RELATED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Several heritage projects and initiatives have produced policy recommendations that aim to better connect the heritage sector with innovation policy and infrastructures. They range in identifying priorities for innovation policy to discussing the needs of heritage practitioners when trying to implement good practices put forward by policy.

RECHARGE

The RECHARGE policy recommendations aim to enhance participatory approaches in the cultural heritage sector for a more sustainable and inclusive sector.[10] They recognise the need for policies that are more inclusive, people-centred, and that can actively support participation and build sustainable partnerships. Of their policy recommendations, innovation policy could play a role in the following:

- Recognise relationship-building and community participation as core competency to heritage work and support them accordingly.
- Provide robust support for capacity-building programmes that equip cultural heritage organisations to effectively implement participatory approaches.
- Promote innovative and participatory financing and legal models for cultural heritage through research and training.
- Establish an EU-wide Cultural living labs recognition scheme to boost the visibility of participatory co-creation practices and encourage their uptake across the cultural heritage sector.
- Develop an EU evaluation framework for participatory heritage, enabling research on effectiveness and efficiency.

ARCHE SRIA

Three priorities were identified in the ARCHE SRIA: Cultural Heritage and Environment – Strengthening Resilience through Risk Assessment and Management, Climate Mitigation and Adaptation; Cultural Heritage and Society – Enhancing the Resilience of Society; and Cultural Heritage and Governance – Seizing Opportunities towards Sustainable Development. The following operational instruments have been put forward to support these:[11]

- Funding instruments:
  - Joint transnational calls for collaborative proposals of research and innovation.
- Networking instruments:
  - Outreach and valorisation activities
  - Capacity building
  - Knowledge Hubs
  - Cultural diplomacy, widening, and internationalisation activities
  - National coordination activities
  - Living Labs
- Exploratory and Assessment instruments:
  - Scoping workshops
  - o Joint monitoring, evaluation and learning exercises

[10] https://recharge-culture.eu/processes/policyrecommendations?locale=en
[11] ARCHE SRIA and its Synthesis, https://www.heritageresearch-hub.eu/app/uploads/2025/06/ARCHE-D2.6-ARCHE-SRIA-and-its-Synthesis.pdf

- Mapping exercises and knowledge synthesis papers
- Foresight exercises
- Joint strategies and papers

The LibrarIN policy brief shared insights on how to share 'good practices' so that they can be useful to many library stakeholders, and discussed risks faced by libraries when trying to diffuse 'best practices' and adapt them to local contexts.[12]

- A good practice by a single library may not have intended effects when implemented by a networked organisation
- Assumption that any idea or practice may work in any other context, geographic area, or time
- Absence of suitable indicators against which to assess the good practice and its replicability
- Mismatch between 'best' practice and community needs

[12] LibrarIN Policy Brief, Collaborative Innovation and Best Practice Diffusion in European Libraries: Adapting for Local Impact, May 2025.

5 Policy recommendations

Based on the input and discussions from the 8th *ekip* Policy Lab, Community Review Workshop, and discussions with key stakeholders, the following recommendations aim to recognise and strengthen the innovation potential of CHIs, build and support infrastructure that facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration, and develop relevant innovation skills and capacities for CHIs. The recommendations are targeted at EU level policy, heritage networks, and innovation ecosystems that wish to better support CHIs as innovation partners.

To structure the policy recommendations, this report builds on the building blocks introduced earlier (see Chapter 1). The building blocks present categories of innovation policy levers that can be activated to develop, foster, and strengthen open innovation ecosystems. Discussions of challenges and areas for intervention have been viewed through the lens of the building blocks. To tackle a specific challenge or issue, multiple building blocks may be relevant or interact. Therefore, this report first presents five cross-cutting areas of recommendations, that reflect a call to action on a holistic level. For each, specific actions target a building block.

Cross-cutting priorities:	Building blocks to leverage:
1. Develop a common vision and narrative of how CHIs drive and facilitate (social) innovation. For CHIs to take part in innovation processes and play a role in innovation ecosystems with other CCIs and other sectors, definitions, narratives, and structures of 'innovation' at European, national and local levels should go beyond the profit- and technology-driven to include and prioritise value-driven (social) innovation, and define CHIs role in this process In parallel, the CHIs can choose to shift or expand their mandate to include this innovation role.	• Social Dimension • Investment and Funding: • Sustainable Competitiveness • Research, Innovation and Technologies
2. Foster the capacity and motivation to innovate at the organisational and individual level. Strengthening the innovation capacity of CHIs requires targeted support for both people and institutions. In practice, this means providing accessible training on collaboration, co-creation, community engagement, and innovation literacy; peer-learning formats such as mentoring, exchanges, and communities of practice; and simplified access to R&I funding through clearer language, lighter procedures, and microgrants for early-stage experimentation. At the organisational level, this involves supporting CHIs to develop innovation strategies, allocating dedicated time and resources for experimentation, and creating stable career paths that allow staff to build expertise over the long term. It also includes cultivating leadership that encourages risk-taking and reflective practice. Together, these measures enable CHIs not only to innovate within their own processes but also to participate confidently and effectively in cross-sectoral innovation ecosystems.	• Skills • Research, Innovation and Technologies • Sustainable Competitiveness • Infrastructures • Investment and Funding

Cross-cutting priorities:	Building blocks to leverage:
3. Sustain and invest in the networks and infrastructures needed for knowledge-sharing. Many CHIs are part of local ecosystems and more widespread networks that play important roles in building a shared field of knowledge, by sharing good practices, challenges, and tools. These environments are also important for building foundations for partnerships and for finding new collaborations. As a form of pooling resources, these networks support the flexibility and sustainability of the entire sector, especially in the face of project-based funding cycles or precarious working conditions.	• Infrastructures • Skills • Sustainable Competitiveness • Investment and Funding
4. Encourage and facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration, with other CCIs and sectors beyond. To tap into the potential role of CHIs as facilitators and connectors in innovation processes, it is crucial that other sectors see CHIs as valuable and relevant partners. Benefits are already visible in collaborations where, for example, culture is contributing to preventative health care. CHIs should participate in cross-sectoral innovation infrastructures, such as innovation hubs, that support idea-sharing and networking, to meet other sectors. Incentives to work with CHIs can be fostered or put in place, and barriers to public-private collaboration can be removed or simplified. To support the long-term sustainability of these collaborations, participatory business models can be developed.	• Infrastructures • Regulation and Governance • Investment and Funding • Research, Innovation and Technologies • Social Dimension
5. Support the scaling of experiments into innovation and into replicable long-term initiatives. CHIs are part of innovative experiments and projects; however, it is challenging to scale these experiments or one-off initiatives so that they are sustainable long-term and that others may replicate them. The precarity of project-based funding and work can inhibit innovation processes. To support innovation processes, CHIs need both long-term support and flexibility to adapt, which should be addressed across funding and financing measures, innovation infrastructures and knowledge-sharing networks, and skills development.	• Investment & Funding • Infrastructures • Sustainable Competitiveness • Regulation and Governance • Skills

Building on the five cross-cutting recommendations above, the following part of the chapter outlines targeted actions for each open innovation building block. These actions show how different areas of policy can work together to create more enabling conditions for cultural heritage-led open innovation.

5.1 OPEN INNOVATION BUILDING BLOCK: SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVENESS

5.1.1 Recognise the importance of social and sustainable innovation, and the role of narrative creation

Why:

Social and sustainable innovation expand the meaning of innovation beyond technological progress or economic growth. Cultural heritage institutions create public value by generating shared meaning, civic engagement, and long-term cultural sustainability. Recognising these contributions positions CHIs as essential players in building socially responsive innovation systems.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

By broadening the understanding of innovation to include care-based, community-driven, and creative approaches, CHIs can contribute to more inclusive and participatory innovation processes. This ensures that innovation systems serve social and cultural goals alongside economic ones.

What to do:

- Introduce funding instruments dedicated to civic-driven and social innovation.
- Broaden evaluation criteria and the design of project calls and destinations in Creative Europe and Horizon Europe to include community-based and care-oriented practices.
- Recognise and support Living Lab methodologies in the CH sector by encouraging their inclusion in funding calls.
- Create funding mechanisms that support long-term impact by allowing light-touch follow-up or implementation funding to embed successful pilots, strengthen pathways to social and cultural uptake, and enable CHIs to consolidate results beyond a single project cycle.
- Support emerging professionals with fellowships and opportunities for cross-sector career development.

5.1.2 Support the exchange of knowledge on sustainable and participatory business models

Why:

Many CHIs depend on project-based funding, which limits their capacity for long-term planning and innovation. Developing sustainable business models using participatory methods can help diversify income streams and contribute to reducing this precarity while ensuring that economic viability aligns with cultural and social value creation.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem: When CHIs adopt participatory and community-centred business models, they create resilient structures that connect local stakeholders, redistribute value, and sustain collaborative innovation over time. These models can also facilitate collaborations between public and private organisations.

What to do:

- Recognise and support socially-driven innovation in public-private funding for cultural heritage institutions
- Support CHIs in developing sustainable, participatory business models by encouraging them to access diverse innovation-oriented funding schemes, build long-term cross-sector partnerships, and integrate financial resilience strategies into organisational planning — not only through training, but through dedicated programmes, mentoring, and policy incentives that enable more flexible and future-oriented funding mixes.

5.2 OPEN INNOVATION BUILDING BLOCK: REGULATION AND GOVERNANCE

5.2.1 Support the development and implementation of co-governance models

Why:

Co-governance enables institutions to share responsibilities, risks, and decision-making across multiple stakeholders, leading to greater flexibility and trust. For smaller or community-based CHIs, it also strengthens their ability to adapt and grow.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

Shared governance encourages collaboration and inclusivity. It allows diverse actors (public, private, and civic) to jointly experiment, plan, and learn, creating a governance culture that mirrors open innovation values.

What to do:

- Promote multi-level co-governance models for innovation projects that bring together public authorities, private actors, and communities.
- Include networking and community-building practices as core innovation activities, in order to give CHIs the time and flexibility to build trust and long-term relationships.
- Encourage innovation ecosystems and partnerships to develop organisational structures that share ownership and risk among multiple partners.

5.2.2 Adapt national and regional legal frameworks to enable innovation

Why:

Current legal and regulatory frameworks often restrict CHIs from experimenting with new partnerships, business models, or community initiatives. Rigid rules around ownership, risk, and profit distribution can discourage collaboration and innovation.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

Adaptive regulation lowers entry barriers and promotes agility. It helps CHIs to engage with new technologies, cross-sector partnerships, and innovative governance models that are essential to open innovation. According to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) "While interesting policy experiments have abounded in recent years in response to digital transformation, one increasingly popular mechanism of ensuring regulatory flexibility has been the emergence of regulatory sandboxes."[13]

What to do:

- Review and adapt national and regional-level legal frameworks that limit experimentation in public CHIs.
- Facilitate CHI representative networks to consider whether the mandates of CHIs should include innovation, collaboration, and social impact as core functions, and support individual organisations in this process.
- Ensure that heritage narratives are not misused to fuel polarisation or exclusion by embedding safeguards into national and regional legal and regulatory frameworks — for example, by requiring transparency in how narratives are constructed, mandating inclusive stakeholder consultation in heritage interpretation, and establishing ethical guidelines or oversight mechanisms that prevent instrumentalisation of heritage in discriminatory or politically divisive ways.

[12] Attrey, A., M. Lesher and C. Lomax (2020), "The role of sandboxes in promoting flexibility and innovation in the digital age", OECD Going Digital Toolkit Notes, No. 2, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/cdf5ed45-en.

5.3 OPEN INNOVATION BUILDING BLOCK: SOCIAL DIMENSION

5.3.1 Mainstream social innovation in innovation policy and innovation practice

Why:

Social innovation addresses societal challenges such as inequality, inclusion, and participation. These are areas where CHIs already play a major role. Recognising and supporting this work can elevate heritage institutions as catalysts of social change.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

By embedding social innovation in policy and practice, innovation becomes more people-centred, diverse, and context-sensitive. This fosters collaboration across communities and sectors, aligning technological and cultural transformation with social wellbeing.

What to do:

- Provide innovation policy incentives for inclusive, participatory, and co-creative practices.
- Invest in community-led projects that promote dialogue, inclusion, and intergenerational exchange.
- Invest in assessing the impacts of such activities and communicate the potential benefits broadly.
- Connect innovation outcomes with broader wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainability objectives.

5.4 OPEN INNOVATION BUILDING BLOCK: RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGIES

5.4.1 Strengthen the research and innovation capacity of CHIs

Why:

CHIs are often excluded from mainstream research and innovation frameworks due to complex language, technical barriers, or limited academic affiliation. Strengthening their capacity allows heritage institutions to actively contribute to innovation rather than remain peripheral.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

Involving CHIs in research and development processes ensures that innovation reflects social and cultural values. It promotes cross-sector collaboration and opens research systems to more diverse forms of knowledge production.

What to do:

- Provide incentives in research and innovation (R&I) calls for CHIs to be included as partners and support their participation by simplifying language and reducing jargon.
- Value social and cultural impact as equally important to scientific or technological outcomes.
- Support practice-based and participatory research linking arts, humanities, and technology.
- Encourage Living Lab environments where CHIs co-create with local communities and other sectors.
- Develop mixed-method impact assessment and evaluation tools that recognise social learning and relational change to be used at the organisational, project, and programme level.

5.5 OPEN INNOVATION BUILDING BLOCK: INFRASTRUCTURES

5.5.1 Recognise knowledge-sharing as essential infrastructure

Why:

Knowledge-sharing networks are fundamental to innovation but often undervalued. Without dedicated spaces and resources for exchange, valuable lessons and experiences remain isolated.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

Strong knowledge infrastructures enable peer learning, replication of good practices, and the long-term sustainability of innovative efforts. They form the social and technical backbone of an open innovation culture.

What to do:

- Provide co-funding mechanisms for CHIs to be able to take part in EU digital innovation hubs.
- Develop open-access repositories for tested cultural innovation practices.
- Ensure equitable access to digital tools and address gaps in digital literacy or connectivity.

5.5.2 Invest in cross-sectoral networks, platforms, and clusters

Why:

Innovation depends on collaboration between different sectors. Many CHIs lack opportunities to connect with actors in technology, business, or education, limiting their ability to scale ideas. At the same time, CHIs can play the role of connectors in these ecosystems to facilitate co-creation between several parties such as community stakeholders, educational institutions and private organisations.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

Cross-sector infrastructures create bridges between fields, enabling the transfer of knowledge, resources, and skills. They also support joint experimentation and trust-building between partners.

What to do:

- Support regional innovation hubs and community-based networks that include CHIs.
- Establish cross-sector clusters linking culture, technology, business, and education.
- Develop open “innovation sandboxes” where CHIs can safely test new ideas.

> *“Scale successful experiments - move from one-off projects to long-term, replicable initiatives.”*

5.6 OPEN INNOVATION BUILDING BLOCK: SKILLS

5.6.1 Improve working conditions and career paths

Why:

Innovation requires skilled and motivated professionals who can experiment and lead change. Yet many CHIs face precarious employment conditions that discourage risk-taking and long-term professional development.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

Stable, fair, and well-supported professionals can contribute to a culture of experimentation and collaboration. This strengthens institutional capacity and keeps innovation talent within the heritage sector.

What to do:

- Promote fair employment and career diversification schemes.
- Introduce innovation fellowships that support experimentation, international and cross-sectoral knowledge exchange, and mentorship.
- Recognise and support emerging roles such as "translators" who bridge cultural, technological, and policy domains.[14]

5.6.2 Strengthen innovation skills and literacy

Why:

Many CHIs do not identify as innovation actors and lack confidence in navigating innovation systems. Building capacity can empower staff to experiment, collaborate, and communicate their value.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

When innovation literacy improves, CHIs become active contributors rather than passive participants. This widens the diversity of actors and perspectives shaping innovation ecosystems.

What to do:

- Develop an EU-wide cultural innovation skills framework aligned with the CHARTER project.
- Encourage cross-sectoral training involving CHIs, creative industries, and researchers.
- Provide access to organisational toolkits, guides, and knowledge repositories.
- Go beyond design thinking and create innovation methods suited to cultural heritage contexts.

[14] See more about emerging roles, http://ekipengine.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Creative-personas-new-jobs-from-social-listening.pdf

5.7 OPEN INNOVATION BUILDING BLOCK: INVESTMENT AND FUNDING

5.7.1 Make funding more flexible and innovation-friendly

Why:

Short-term and rigid funding cycles discourage experimentation and risk-taking. Integrating flexibility into long-term financing can support iterative, learning-based innovation processes that are essential for CHIs.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

By embedding risk tolerance and adaptability of funded projects, such as to alter the original work plan, , funders enable CHIs to test new ideas, learn from failure, and scale successful practices, which are core principles of open innovation.

What to do:

- Create flexible grant schemes supporting iterative and exploratory work.
- Include risk acceptance and learning-by-doing criteria in funding calls.
- Offer microgrants for early-stage innovation and experimentation. At the EU level, this can include the expansion of for example cascading funds.
- Simplify application procedures and reduce unpaid administrative burdens.

5.7.2 Broaden access to innovation funding and procurement

Why:

Many CHIs struggle to access innovation-oriented funding or procurement opportunities due to administrative complexity and linguistic barriers. Broader access ensures that smaller institutions can also participate in innovation ecosystems.

How this builds an open innovation ecosystem:

Expanding access creates more diversity among innovation actors and strengthens collaboration between public, private, and civic sectors. It ensures that innovation is distributed, not centralised.

What to do:

- Simplify administrative procedures by reducing documentation requirements, offering standardised templates, allowing phased or two-step applications (first a concept note and then full proposal), and providing clear guidance in accessible language to help CHIs navigate procurement and innovation funding processes.
- Provide preparatory microgrants to support cross-sector collaboration and proposal development.
- Design public–private funding models that value social and cultural innovation outcomes which CHIs can participate in.

5.8 CONCLUSIONS

Together, these seven building blocks form an integrated framework for strengthening the role of cultural heritage institutions within open innovation ecosystems. Each block addresses a different but interdependent dimension of change — from governance and funding to skills, infrastructure, and social value creation. When implemented in combination, they can transform CHIs from isolated cultural actors into active enablers of cross-sectoral collaboration, experimentation, and learning. The aim is not to turn heritage institutions into technology laboratories, but to recognise them as civic platforms where innovation is rooted in care, continuity, and community participation. By aligning policy, funding, and institutional practices with this broader understanding of innovation, Europe can unlock the full potential of its cultural heritage to drive sustainable, inclusive, and democratic transformation.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The policy recommendations were co-created using the ekip Policy Lab methodology.[15] The methodology designed for the development of policy recommendations as part of a Policy Lab is divided in two consecutive steps:

1) Scoping and identification of the problem: the first step is the identification of the problem and its scoping. The topic is identified and scoped via desk research, interviews with stakeholders and the input from the different consortium partners. As part of the Policy Lab preparatory work, a scoping document is shared with the participants to prepare them ahead of the day and to ensure a common understanding among participants. The scoping documents for this policy are available at https://ekipengine.eu/policies/cultural-heritage-institutions-as-innovation-catalysers/

2) Policy formulation as part of the Policy Lab: The Policy Lab is a moment of co-creation with the participating stakeholders. The goal of the policy formulation session is to develop, refine and propose together with the participants different policies for the challenges at hand. More information on this Policy Lab is available at
https://ekipengine.eu/events/policy-lab-cultural-heritage-institutions-within-open-innovation-ecosystems/

[15] Deliverable D10.1 Methodology of Policy Labs

AGENDA OF THE POLICY LAB

AGENDA Policy Lab session 1 (online 1 September 2025)

10:00-10:15	START Let participants in. Encourage participants to say hello in the chat.
10:05-10:15 (10 min)	Welcome by **Kelly Hazejager,** Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision and Member of *ekip* consortium. • Welcome & Introduction • Goal of the policy lab • Objectives of the session • Brief introduction to *ekip* • Timeline of the policy lab Conversation starter, *'What can innovation in the cultural heritage sector look like?'.* • Participants to add their answer in the chat
10:15-11:00 (45 min) (actually took 65min)	**Step 1:** Presentation on scoping the policy lab by Kelly Hazejager. • Move to Miro for the 'Typology of roles for Cultural Heritage Institutions in Innovation Ecosystems' • Participants can use dot voting to show which of these roles they recognise in themselves/their work.
	Plenary discussion moderated by **Kelly Hazejager** and **Mutaleni Nadimi** on the challenges and needs for these roles: *'What do you see as **challenges and needs** for empowering cultural heritage institutions as innovation actors in these roles?'* • (5 min) Everyone writes individually on post-its • (25 min) Then hosts invite people to share what they have written.
11:00 - 11:40	**Step 2:** Transition to focus on innovation policy. Explanation about the building blocks for innovation ecosystems. (5-10 min) **transition to breakout groups if over 10 participants** Participants to copy & paste the challenges & needs to the relevant building block that SHOULD address this post-it. (5-10 minutes) Then, a discussion on which of these building blocks (in terms of policy) are working well, and which are not. Which are the gaps? (15 minutes) Breakout group moderators: 1. **Kelly Hazejager** (notes: **Gabrielle Aguilar van Gend**) 2. **Mutaleni Nadimi** (notes: **Isabel Beirigo**) 3. **Ragnar Siil** (notes: **Kristiina Urb**)

11:40 - 12:00	Return to plenary. **Kelly** shares screen with Miro. **Moderators** briefly recap (3-5 min) what was discussed in their breakout. Recap breakouts. Wrap up and next steps (5 min) **Susannah Montgomery,** Business Development Manager, EIT Culture & Creativity Northwest to briefly explain community review and partner meeting 2-3 Oct •https://ekipengine.eu/events/ekip-community-review-cultural-heritage-institutions-within-open-innovation-ecosystems/

AGENDA Policy Lab session 2 (online 4 September 2025)

10:00-10:15	START Let participants in. Encourage participants to say hello in the chat.
10:05-10:10	Welcome by **Ragnar Siil,** CEO of Creativity Lab and Member of *ekip* consortium • Welcome & Introduction • Brief introduction to *ekip* • Objectives of this policy lab • Timeline of the policy lab
10:10-10:20	**Kelly Hazejager** to recap previous session with 3 synthesised challenges & Building Blocks 1. Socially Driven Innovation 2. Continuity & Sustainable Innovation 3. Capacity to Innovate
10:20-10:25	Explanation of break-out sessions
10:35-11:10	In breakout groups, discuss the assigned 1-2 challenges. • Start by discussing what is on the recap slide. Is there anything missing, or is there anything in particular we want to dive into. • Spend the majority of the time discussing what are relevant policy interventions/recommendations related to this synthesised challenge. • The post-its from Session 1 can be referred to if needed. Group 1: **Ragnar Siil** (notes: **Grete Kodi**) Group 2: **Kelly Hazejager** (notes: **Kristiina Urb**)
11:10-11:50	Plenary discussion/recap of synthesised challenges led by Ragnar Siil.
11:50-12:00	Wrap up and next steps. • The process of writing policy recommendations. • 2 October event - Hilversum Community Review Workshop.

PARTICIPANT LIST

First name	Last name	Organisation	Country of origin
Ana Maria	Stan	DG RTD	Belgium
Benjamin	Rostén	Futhark AB	Sweden
Bodil	Malmström	Lund University	Sweden
Ceyda	Berk-Söderblom	Trans Europe Halles	Sweden
Chiara	Nardis	Università degli Studi di Firenze	Italy
Corinne	Szteinsznader	Michael Culture	France
Diana	Fehr	MuseoSpace	Netherlands
Elena	Vasilakis	Vg, IIMN	Greece
Fatina	Saikaly	The World Crafts Council	Italy
Federica	Zane	Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	Spain
Grete	Kodi	Creativity Lab	Estonia
Haris	Shekeris	Catalink Ltd.	Cyprus
Isabel	Beirigo	Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision	Netherlands
Jalil	Khan	Self Employed	Other
Johan	Grundström Eriksson	Lund University	Sweden
Katarzyna	Marcol	University of Silesia	Poland
Kelly	Hazejager	Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision	Netherlands
Kristiina	Urb	Creativity Lab	Estonia

First name	Last name	Organisation	Country of origin
Lennart	Stoy	Technopolis Group	Belgium
Mara	D'andrea	European network of Cultural Centres	Belgium
Marco	Fiore	MCA	France
Marlene	Dirven	Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision	Netherlands
Martha	Mosha	University of Cologne	Germany
Merje	Laiapea	Independent	Estonia
Mutaleni	Nadimi	Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision	Netherlands
Paola	Derudas	Lund University	Sweden
Pratik	Vithlani	Riksteatern	Sweden
Ragnar	Siil	Creativity Lab	Estonia
Randi	Cecchine	Radboud University	Estonia
Rasa	Bocyte	Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision	Netherlands
Remco	van Bladel	Archival Consciousness	Netherlands
Rickard	Bucksch	European Commission	Belgium
Sevay ipek	Aydin	Spectacled Tales Atelier	Finland
Siepke	van Keulen	Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision	Netherlands
Susannah	Montgomery	EIT Culture and Creativity	Netherlands
Yasmina	Ramada Lahoz	Ayuntamiento de Segovia	Spain

1.1 AGENDA OF THE VALIDATION WORKSHOP

09:30	Welcome & Introduction By **Mutaleni Nadimi,** Product Manager: Research & Heritage, Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision and Member of ekip consortium and **Gijs Gootjes,** Director, EIT Culture & Creativity Northwest
09:45	Typology of roles for Cultural Heritage Institutions in Innovation Ecosystems By **Josep Maria Folch Olivella**, Research Consultant, Hexagonal LAB and Researcher for the *ekip* Policy Lab
10:00	Typologies in practice By **Florian Schneider,** Director, Institute of Creativity, University of Galway
10:15	Icebreaker
10:30	Coffee break
10:45	Policy recommendations Presented by **Kelly Hazejager,** Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision and Member of *ekip* consortium.
11:00	World Cafe - addressing the policy recommendations
12:00	Plenary Discussion
12:30	Lunch