



ekip
EUROPEAN CULTURAL
AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
INNOVATION POLICY PLATFORM

***ekip* High-Level Policy Event May 4, 2026**

Pre-Event Briefing Material

Ten Recommendations by *ekip*

Based on the evidence and insights generated through the *ekip* Engine (a CCI Community centered innovation policy process) ten recommendations to support a future-ready, culturally grounded and innovation-driven Europe.



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Executive Summary

Europe is approaching a decisive turning point in shaping its next research and innovation framework at a time marked by climate urgency, digital transformation, geopolitical instability and societal fragmentation.

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs)—employing more than seven million people—constitute one of Europe’s most underutilised innovation assets. CCIs contribute meaning-making, co-creation, participatory methods, imaginative foresight, and deep user understanding—capacities increasingly essential for addressing Europe’s complex transitions. Yet they remain structurally marginalised in EU R&I policies and funding mechanisms, creating a significant gap between Europe’s innovation needs and the systems currently designed to address them.

The **ekip Engine** tests and demonstrates how CCIs can be meaningfully embedded into innovation ecosystems through open-innovation approaches. Its work across cities such as Rotterdam, Tallinn, Lund, Bratislava and Košice confirms that CCIs contribute essential competencies in early-stage innovation processes and that innovation ecosystems require new structures and capacities to benefit from these contributions.

A key insight from *ekip*’s work is that Europe’s innovation systems continue to be shaped by a technology-centred legacy that limits participation from CCIs and constrains cross-sectoral experimentation. This misalignment persists despite the growing recognition that societal transitions require cultural, social and human-centred approaches—capacities CCIs inherently provide.

In response, *ekip* promotes **Open Innovation 3.0**, which places CCIs at the heart of innovation processes and argues for foresight-driven policy development. This approach supports ecosystem-level innovation structures that can handle diverse inputs, encourage experimentation, and address multi-stakeholder complexity.

This briefing material for the *ekip* High-Level Policy Event showcases how this shift can be implemented through four thematic lenses, corresponding to four sessions:

1. Cross-innovation with the CCIs: Highlights that CCIs are strong but under-recognised innovation actors, held back by the divide between cultural and innovation policy. *ekip* recommends acknowledging innovation by cultural production, improving support systems, and shifting focus from unicorns to swarms of creative micro-companies.

2. Investable innovation portfolios, city prototyping and ecosystem inventories: Shows how cities can make CCI-driven innovation investable through city prototyping and ecosystem inventories, with intermediaries playing a crucial role. A portfolio approach strengthens resilience and increases investor appeal.

3. Strengthening ecosystem building blocks through S3 and CCI strategies: Stresses the need to align Smart Specialisation (S3) and CCI strategies to fully integrate CCIs, embed open innovation, and support societal and human-centred outcomes, while clarifying CCIs’ role in key transitions.

4. New funding models for creativity and innovation: Emphasises new funding models, calling for accessible infrastructures and long-term investment in intermediaries connecting creative, scientific, technological and public actors. *ekip* provides foresight-driven insights to guide cross-sector innovation in future EU frameworks.

Together, these insights present a coherent vision: Europe must reconfigure innovation systems to embrace cultural, social and creative intelligence as core drivers of competitiveness, resilience and democratic renewal in alignment of **both the Competitiveness and Cultural Compasses**.

Ten Recommendations

Based on the evidence and insights generated through the *ekip* Engine, the following ten recommendations support a future-ready, culturally grounded and innovation-driven Europe:

1. Recognise CCIs as strategic contributors to European innovation

- CCIs should be formally embedded across all EU R&I programmes, including through representation in governance bodies—particularly those shaping Pillar 2 in FP10. This ensures that cultural and societal dimensions inform strategic decision-making.

2. Bridge the divide between cultural and innovation policy frameworks

- Create governance mechanisms that intentionally connect cultural and innovation policies, which currently operate on different logics: cultural policy focuses on who is eligible to shape cultural value, while innovation policy prioritises scalable outputs and economic impact.

3. Reform innovation ecosystem building blocks

- Innovation infrastructures, intermediaries, testbeds and evaluation methods must be reconfigured to support open innovation and enable meaningful CCI participation.

4. Create new entry models and access mechanisms for CCIs in ecosystems

- Introduce appropriate evaluation criteria and guidance for forming balanced consortia to ensure that creative micro-companies can participate effectively in R&I initiatives, by shifting focus from unicorns to Swarms and portfolios, making cross- and transformative innovation possible.

5. Support and grow Europe's bridge-builders

- Bridge-builders—organisations connecting culture, science, technology and policy—should be systematically identified, networked and funded, as they are critical for cross-sector innovation.

6. Align Smart Specialisation strategies with national and regional CCI strategies

- Such alignment strengthens innovation ecosystems, embeds open-innovation practices, and ensures that CCIs contribute to resilience, competitiveness and societal well-being.

7. Strengthen resilience and cross-sectoral innovation pathways

- Areas such as AI for creative workflows, immersive media, ecodesign, and cultural participation should become explicit FP10 focus areas due to their strong innovation potential.

8. Ensure CCIs appear across all European Competitiveness Fund windows

- CCIs must be recognised as relevant not only to digital leadership but also to green, resilience and industrial competitiveness priorities.

9. Leverage Regulatory Sandboxes with the CCIs:

- To be effective, regulatory sandboxes should be designed to include CCI actors and be incorporated systematically into EU programmes to strengthen experimentation, evidence-based policymaking, and long-term innovation capacity.

10. Establish a continuous strategic-foresight mechanism to accompany an EU-wide CCI platform.

- This would ensure that emerging challenges and opportunities are systematically transformed into actionable innovation policy that strengthens an integrated, EU-wide CCI ecosystem.

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1 Introduction to *ekip* and the Event

Europe is entering a decisive moment in shaping future programmes for R&I, at a time characterised by climate urgency, rapid digital transformation, geopolitical instability and societal fragmentation. The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs)—a major European sector employing over seven million people—represent one of the continent’s most significant untapped resources for innovation.

ekip, the European Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Policy Platform, has built and tested an open-innovation-based policy engine that demonstrates why CCIs must play a central role in European R&I initiatives at all levels to fulfil the European Strategic Agenda regarding democracy, security and competitiveness, and beyond. CCIs bring essential capacities for meaning-making, experimentation, user engagement, and cross-sector translation, all prerequisites for impactful innovation.

ekip is tasked to deliver up-to-date, knowledge- and data-driven policy recommendations that will put forward concrete suggestions for future R&I actions targeting both existing and new policy measures that can be part of the broader EU policy frameworks. Since 2023, the *ekip* Engine has delivered foresight-oriented policy recommendations to reveal how the building blocks of innovation ecosystems need to change to unlock the power of the CCIs, using a broad variety of current policy areas as lenses to provide contexts. The High-Level Policy Event “Shifting How Innovation Policy Works in Europe” is a major dissemination component organised by *ekip* together with key stakeholders in the European innovation ecosystem. The purpose is to explore key questions and find ways to move forward together. It has been preceded by the much-appreciated campaign “Creatives being the missing piece: an untapped force to reset ecosystems”.

The event is organised into four thematic sessions with guests, friends, and *ekip* panellists and moderators. This pre-event briefing material provides a background to the themes and put them into context with references to material produced and gathered by *ekip*. Before the themes are presented, some key *ekip* concepts and points of departures are described to provide a common foundation for all sessions. In the Annex, a summary is provided of how the policy recommendations from *ekip* can be integrated in future European investments in research and innovation, in alignment with both the Competitiveness and Cultural Compasses.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>10-11</p> <p><i>ekip</i> Engine Cross-innovation with the CCI Policy recommendations by <i>ekip</i></p> <p>With <i>Guests</i> MARTIN HOJSÍK, vice president EP With <i>Friends</i> MARIA PILAR AGUAR FERNANDEZ Director EC DG RTD, and TONI ATTARD Attard Founder and Director of Culture Venture</p> <p>↘</p> | <p>11-12</p> <p>Investable innovation Portfolios City prototyping & ecosystem inventory</p> <p>With <i>Guest</i> FELIPE BUITRAGO Creative economy at WIPO With <i>Friends</i> ANETTE SCHAEFER CEO EIT CC, and MARK VAN ITERSON Chair of Association of Deutch Designers and former Design Director at Heineken Co</p> <p>↘</p> |
| <p>13-14 Ecosystem building blocks - Open innovation a standard practice - powered by S3 and CCI Strategies</p> <p>With <i>Guest</i> HARALD HARTUNG, author of “Unleashing the Potential of the CCI” and former HEAD OF UNIT DG RTD With <i>Friends</i> WOLFGANG MÜNCH senior expert DG REGIO EC, and ANNA SPECHTENHAUSER Stuttgart Region/ERRIN</p> <p>↘</p> | <p>14-15 Financing Europe's most transformative asset New funding models for creativity and innovation - <i>ekip</i> beyond 2026</p> <p>With <i>Guest</i> CHRISTIAN EHLER MP EP With <i>Friends</i> ALBERTO MINA Milano Innovation district, and ANNE-MARIE SASSEN Head of Unit at EIC</p> <p>↘</p> |

Innovation happens where boundaries break.

What are we set to do? ↘

MISSION

To empower Europe's CCI's through smarter, fairer innovation policy for Europe's competitiveness.

VISION

To make open innovation the standard practice in ecosystems so that Cultural and Creative Industries can: - be part of driving transformative change

ekip brings together creatives, policymakers, researchers, and industry leaders to reshape how innovation happens in Europe, making it more open, collaborative, and effective.

We develop targeted strategies to strengthen innovation ecosystems around Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs), helping them lead Europe's green, digital, and social transitions.

At the core of our work is this belief:

Open innovation should be the rule, not the exception.

That means:

- Moving away from siloed approaches to innovation
- Making collaboration between creatives, institutions, researchers, and businesses the default
- Designing policies and funding structures that reward shared knowledge and co-created solutions

ekip works to embed open innovation into how ecosystems function, not as a one-off experiment, but as a daily practice.

Real impact happens when we work beyond silos.

www.ekipengine.se

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ekip partners

The ekip partners represent key stakeholders in ecosystems, where a vital collaboration between universities, expert organisations, cities and communities are crucial.

UNIVERSITIES

CREATIVE AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

CONSULTANCIES

CITIES & INTERMEDIARIES

ekip

www.ekipengine.eu

Funded by the European Union

How does ekip work? ↘

How do we make policy innovation happen? This is where the ekip Engine comes in, a connected process that moves from insight to action, creating output as it moves across Europe.

Activities:

- Policy Labs
- Policy Dialogues
- City Prototyping
- Ecosystem Inventories
- Policy Corners
- Policy Mappings
- Hackathons
- Policy Academy
- Policy Factories
- Social Listening

Outputs:

- Policy Recommendations
- Policy Dialogue Reports
- Innovation Portfolios
- City Cases/Canvas tools
- Facilitators guides
- Policy Papers/Articles
- Policy Posters/Briefing
- Scoping Papers
- Open Conversation Reports
- Job Reports
- Trend reports



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2 Key ekip Concepts and Points of Departure

#CulturalAndInnovationPolicy #InnovationEcosystems #OpenInnovation #BuildingBlocks

"Arts and culture are not peripheral to economic development but essential to both stimulating and directing economic growth toward more creative, inclusive and sustainable societies and generating high economic multipliers and dynamic spillovers across the economy and society." Mazzucato, 2025¹.

"Human values, such as dignity, freedom, equality and justice, are at the core of the EU and the European way of life. European innovation, to be successful, therefore must be based on these values, not on technological and economic progress alone. Climate change, poverty, the polarisation between members of society – the world's grand challenges come with a strong human and social dimension, which must be considered. To build a prosperous future, people and their wellbeing should be placed at the centre of research and innovation."

The knowledge produced by social sciences, arts and humanities (SSAH) is indispensable in this regard and must become an integral part of European research and innovation (R&I). A deeper integration of SSAH into future R&I programmes is required to inspire transdisciplinary research models that truly reflect the complex challenges of our age and help build and uphold more resilient societies. As the EU prepares the groundwork for its next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), many experts have been calling for SSAH to be better incorporated into the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) and thus strengthen the backbone of an innovative and competitive Europe." From the Human Values and Grand Challenges conference, hosted by Aalborg University in collaboration with University of Southern Denmark and Copenhagen Business School on December 1-2, 2025, in Copenhagen as part of Denmark's Presidency of the Council of the European Union²

2.1 Cultural and Innovation Policy

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) constitute a structurally important part of Europe's socio-economic fabric. Beyond their economic contribution, CCIs enhance Europe's innovation capacity by providing interpretative skills, creative experimentation, and human-centred approaches essential for societal transitions. The challenges facing Europe—climate transitions, digital upheavals, ageing populations, misinformation threats—cannot be solved through technological innovation alone. They require cultural understanding and creative, collaborative processes grounded in Europe's diverse traditions where knowledge is translated into action.

¹ Mazzucato, M. (2025). The Public Value of Arts and Culture: Investing in Arts and Culture to Reimagine Economic Growth in the 21st Century. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/publications/2025/sep/public-value-arts-and-culture>

² <https://sciencebusiness.net/report/human-values-and-grand-challenges-ssah-contributions-european-transformations-and-resilience>



Figure 1. Comparison between Cultural and Innovation Policy.

CCIs possess specific strengths that make them indispensable to the future of European R&I systems, especially if the ambition is to achieve intergenerational fairness:

- Ability to navigate ambiguity and open-ended problem spaces.
- Experience with co-creation and participatory methods.
- Capacity for foresight and imaginative scenario building.
- Deep understanding of user cultures, behaviours, and lived experiences.
- Practices rooted in collaboration, sharing and co-opetition.

Yet CCIs remain structurally marginalised in EU R&I funding. The upcoming developments regarding EU R&I support mechanisms create an opportunity to correct this misalignment, by combining cultural and innovation policy development³.

2.2 Innovation Ecosystems

ekip rises from the situation that much contemporary innovation work and offered (public) support in and for ecosystems continue to be influenced by the overtly technology-led history of innovation policies. Resulting from this history, many innovation processes often are inherently considered to be technology-centred instead of other interests and foci. *ekip* builds on the notice of the lesser participation in innovation ecosystems and access to innovation processes by actors from the CCIs. This is intriguing as, at the same time, more complex innovation processes call for creative skills, practices and open approaches that support cross-sectoral engagement and inclusivity that are geared toward larger social changes and solving major challenges.

While acknowledging that the wide variety of actors included in the CCI category can hold ones that, although working with creative contents, are necessarily not that interested in or focussed on creative or

³ <https://ekipengine.eu/understanding-cultural-policies-and-innovation-policies-differences-overlaps-and-societal-benefits/>

innovation processes per se, *ekip* underscores the capacities to creative thinking and running creative processes that many of the CCI professionals possess, apply, and develop regularly in their work. The importance of bringing different viewpoints, ways of thinking and imagining to tables of innovation work is all the more important as people are faced with numerous complex issues and simultaneous crises locally, in Europe, and globally. *ekip* holds the stance that we no longer can afford to neglect the possibilities and competencies that the involvement of the CCI actors in central roles in innovation processes and systems can bring along when solving multifaceted problems of today. *ekip* is addressing this lack of innovation capacity in ecosystems across Europe to include the CCI by promoting open innovation.

2.3 Open Innovation 3.0

Open Innovation, popularized by Henry Chesbrough⁴ in 2003, describes how organizations accelerate development by combining internal ideas with external collaboration from actors like start-ups, universities and customers. Ten years later, Martin Curley and Bror Salminen expanded the concept with Open Innovation 2.0⁵, emphasizing a mindset of adaptability and teamwork to drive impactful innovation.



**The problem?
It's the ecosystems.**

Despite their proven value, CCIs remain fragmented, underfunded, and disconnected from mainstream innovation infrastructures. They operate in ecosystems that don't always recognise or reward their contribution. Innovation policy is still largely written for tech and science, with creatives treated as add-ons, not as core actors.

That's why *ekip* exists: to change this dynamic.

To move CCIs from the margins to the centre of Europe's innovation future, by redesigning ecosystem policies.

 www.ekipengine.eu  Funded by the European Union

Figure 2. Creating new opportunities by creating one, thriving ecosystem.

From this perspective, innovation is not just an imperative for economic and social progress, but a composite of mindset, art, skill and societal capability that underpins the survival and progress of the human species. Open Innovation 2.0 predominantly proposed to become a paradigm buster for citizens and users, making them an integral part of the innovation process.

ekip promotes Open Innovation 3.0, building upon the prior versions but with two major additions: (1) a strong emphasis on CCI engagement to enhance innovation work in all kinds of business areas, and (2)

⁴ Chesbrough, H. (2003), "Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology", Harvard Business School Press

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/24-oispgopeninnovation20anewparadigm-whitepaper.pdf>

foresight-driven policy recommendations targeting innovation policies to make this possible and feasible⁶.

Such an approach allows handling inputs from several actors and directing them towards value-creating innovation. Open Innovation and ecosystem thinking is even more pertinent in the era of green and digital transformations and other global challenges such as the energy crisis that are heavily impacting the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) and need fast policy adaptation. However, open innovation principles are still rarely applied as normal practice⁷. Existing support structures and innovation ecosystems are not designed for this and there are few guiding policies to support creative and society-centred innovation and multi-stakeholder innovation practices.

More effective policies are needed so that supportive ecosystems for complex innovation will operate according to open innovation principles. Ecosystem-centric, cross-organisational innovation conducted in portfolios⁸ rather than single projects must become normal not only for CCI ecosystems but for the innovation ecosystems at large.

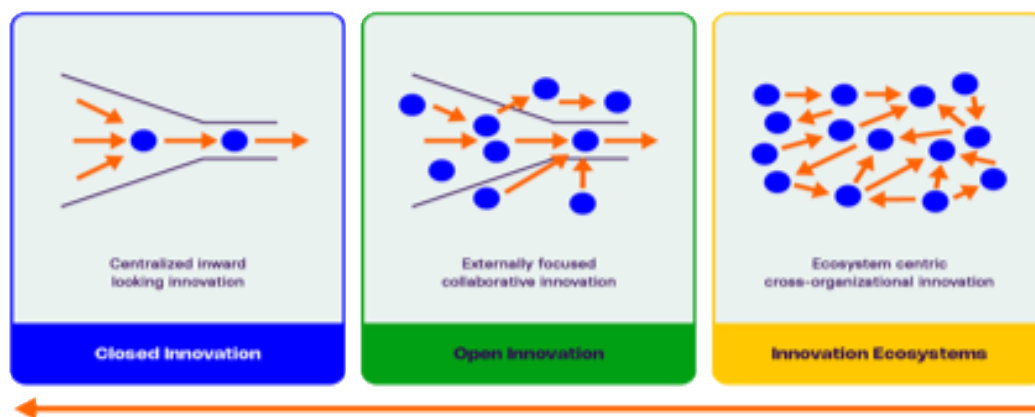


Figure 3. Illustrations highlighting that complex innovation with diverse competences does not start in a single point of growth, but rather in an ecosystem scaling and growth.

Given these challenges, *ekip* - European Cultural and Creative Industries Policy Platform support the development of policies that make the use of open innovation processes into the new standard. This will ensure that supportive ecosystems develop a capacity to handle complex multi-stakeholder innovation processes needed to realise more innovations in collaboration with the CCIs in Europe. Also driving the behavioural change towards a more green, inclusive and digital Europe, and at the same time contribute to EU's security, competitiveness, and democratic values.

The *ekip* Engine⁹, developed and tested across 2023–2025, is an open-innovation policy process grounded in real ecosystem needs, cross-sector collaboration and evidence-based iteration. Each stage builds collective intelligence within ecosystems, ensuring that innovation policies are rooted in real needs and informed by diverse stakeholders, including CCIs. *ekip*'s work across Rotterdam, Tallinn, Lund,

⁶ See the *ekip* White Paper "Why Open Innovation with the CCIs can be a Game-Changer for Europe".

⁷ Open Innovation is sometimes confused with the concept of Open Source. They both leverage collaboration to enhance development but differ in scope and intent. Open Source refers specifically to the free sharing, modification, and community development of software code. Open Innovation is a broader business strategy involving the strategic, purposeful inflow and outflow of knowledge—ideas, intellectual property, or R&D—to accelerate internal innovation or expand markets

⁸ <https://ekipengine.eu/innovation-portfolios-pave-the-way-for-collaborations-with-the-creatives-2/>

⁹ <https://ekipengine.eu/about-us/ekip-engine/>

Bratislava, Košice and other European hubs shows that CCI provide crucial competencies for early-stage innovation.

2.4 Ecosystem Building Blocks

During the first years of running the *ekip* Engine recommendations related to nine areas have been produced¹⁰ and four more are in the pipeline for 2026. Although focusing different topics such as "Fashion transition: eco-design for circularity", "Platformisation of the music industry" and "Cross-innovation with the performing arts", they all address what has been called Building Blocks in innovation ecosystems¹¹. The policy areas function as lenses highlighting different aspects of the Building Blocks and how they can be developed to better suit the CCI and enable open innovation.

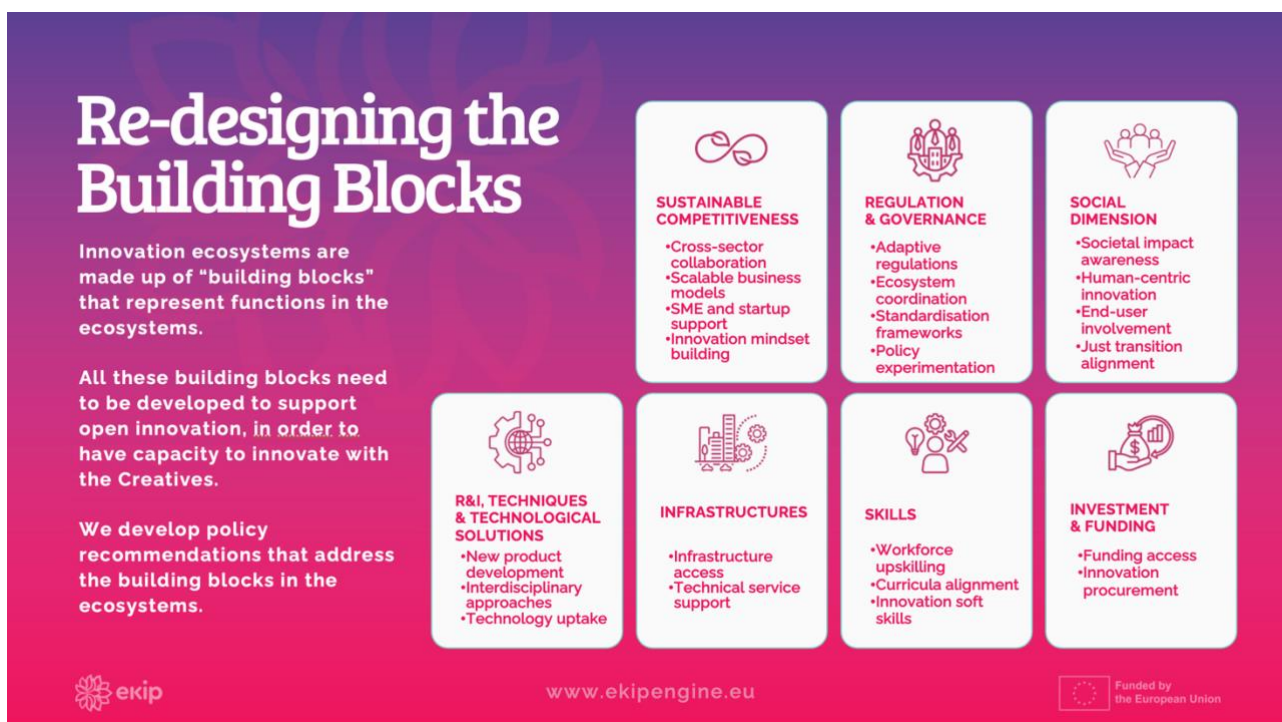


Figure 4. "Building Blocks" constituting components or functions in an ecosystem that are addressed thru the different policy areas processed by the *ekip* Engine. The policy areas function as lenses highlighting different aspects and importance of the building blocks and the need for them.

The *ekip* Engine makes sure that the policy areas selected are relevant to the developments within the EU and the upcoming topics for 2026 are related to deep tech, resilience, infrastructures and funding models

The work in *ekip* for example through City Prototyping and in national CCI strategy processes indicates that policy development using the methods and materials produced through the *ekip* Engine have an impact on the development of these Building Blocks. However, for this to happen on a large scale on different levels, support to organisation orchestrating such processes must continue and increase, and ways to monitor the progress need to be developed further.

¹⁰ <https://ekipengine.eu/policy-areas/>

¹¹ <https://ekipengine.eu/boosting-innovation-across-sectors-and-borders/>

3 The Four Sessions

The *ekip* High-Level Policy Event "Shifting How Innovation Works in Europe" is divided into four consecutive and inter-related sessions. They are described in more detail below, focusing on the questions that will be discussed, sources for more information and recommendations for future R&I programme development in Europe.

3.1 The *ekip* Engine - Cross-innovation with the CCI, Policy recommendations by *ekip*

***ekip* presenter** CHARLOTTE LORENTZ HJORTH – Lund University

With Guest MARTIN HOJSÍK, VICE-PRESIDENT EP

With Friends MARIA PILARAGUAR FERNANDEZ Director EC DG RTD, and TONI ATTARD Founder and Director of Culture Venture

***ekip* panellist** MARCIN POPRAWSKI – HUMAK

***ekip* moderator** ISABELLE DE VOLDERE - IDEA

Key questions:

- The Cultural and Creative Industries are powerful innovation actors, but policy frameworks still treat culture and innovation separately. How can Europe unlock the innovation power of cultural production?
- What is the different logic between cultural policy and innovation policy, and how can they work together?
- Could the concept like "Innovation by cultural production" become a recognized policy pathway?
- What capacities and support systems are needed for CCIs to engage in innovation ecosystems?
- How can policy support "swarms" of creative micro-companies, rather than focusing only on unicorns?

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) hold significant yet underutilised potential as drivers of cross-sector innovation in Europe. However, current policy frameworks still treat culture and innovation as largely separate domains, limiting the transformative capacity of cultural production. The *ekip* Engine demonstrates how structured, open-innovation processes can integrate CCI actors more effectively into broader innovation ecosystems and accelerate cross-innovation. Through its foresight-driven and evidence-based approach, the *ekip* Engine identifies where ecosystem bottlenecks occur and how CCIs can contribute meaningfully to emerging societal and technological transitions.

Cross-innovation requires policy environments that recognise the distinct logics of cultural and innovation policy and enable them to work together. To achieve this, *ekip* recommends strengthening the support systems and capacities that allow CCIs to fully participate in innovation ecosystems, including tailored access points, intermediaries, and funding instruments designed for creative micro-enterprises. The concept of innovation by cultural production¹² should be formally acknowledged as a legitimate and strategic policy pathway, reflecting the unique contributions of CCIs to experimentation, meaning-making, and early-stage innovation.

A shift towards supporting swarms of creative micro-companies¹³, rather than focusing primarily on high-growth "unicorns", is essential for unlocking the distributed and diverse creativity that underpins

¹² <https://ekipengine.eu/cci-many-inventions-but-little-innovation/>

¹³ <https://ekipengine.eu/the-challenge-isnt-creativity-but-connectivity/>

Europe's competitive advantage. These micro-actors form the backbone of CCI-driven innovation, but they require flexible policy tools, accessible funding, and collaborative infrastructures to engage in cross-sector processes. By embedding open-innovation principles and actively integrating CCIs into the design of innovation policies, Europe can significantly enhance its capacity to deliver socially relevant, human-centred, and future-resilient innovation outcomes.

Key implications for future EU R&I programmes:

- Bridge the cultural–innovation policy divide so CCI actors can fully participate in and strengthen Europe's innovation ecosystems.
- Recognise CCIs as strategic contributors to innovation.
- Integrate CCIs into governance structures.
- Adjust evaluation criteria to reflect cultural value, meaning-making, early-stage experimentation and participatory methods.
- Formalise "innovation by cultural production" as a legitimate innovation pathway.
- Replace unicorn-centric logic with investment in swarms of micro-enterprises.

3.2 Investable innovation Portfolios - City prototyping & Ecosystem inventory

ekip presenter KATARINA SCOTT – Future by Lund

With Guest FELIPE BUITRAGO Creative economy at WIPO

With Friends ANETTE SCHAEFER CEO EIT CC, and MARK VAN ITERSON Chair of Association of Deutch Designers and former Design Director at Heineken Co

ekip panellist ZORA JAUROVA – Bratislava

ekip moderator CHARLOTTE LORENTZ HJORTH – Lund University

Key questions:

- How can cities strengthen the innovation capacity of the CCIs and make CCI-driven innovation more investable?
- How can a portfolios approach increase the investability of CCI-driven and cross-sector innovation?
- Cities operate in a market of ecosystems, supporting companies through intermediaries: how can they mobilize these actors to invest in CCI innovation capacity?
- What distinguishes a CCI ecosystem from a "standard" innovation ecosystem?

Cities play a crucial role in strengthening the innovation capacity of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) by creating environments where CCI-driven and cross-sector innovation can grow and become investable¹⁴. Building on insights from the *ekip* Engine, this session highlights how a portfolio approach enables cities to support a diverse set of interconnected initiatives rather than isolated projects, increasing both resilience and investability¹⁵. Through city prototyping, municipalities can experiment with new forms of collaboration, test early-stage ideas, and activate local innovation ecosystems in ways that make the value of CCI-driven innovation more visible and attractive to investors.

At the same time, conducting an ecosystem inventory helps cities understand the actors, infrastructures, and intermediaries that shape their innovation environment. Because cities operate through networks of intermediaries, identifying and mobilising these organisations is essential for expanding CCI innovation

¹⁴ See results from City Prototyping in the ekip Knowledge Bank <https://knowledge-bank.ekipengine.eu>

¹⁵ <https://ekipengine.eu/innovation-portfolios-pave-the-way-for-collaborations-with-the-creatives-2/>

capacity. Finally, recognising what distinguishes a CCI ecosystem from a conventional innovation ecosystem—such as its creative processes, diverse micro-actors, and culture-driven logic—allows cities to tailor their support structures, funding mechanisms, and policy tools to effectively unlock CCI-based innovation.

Key implications for future EU R&I programmes:

- Expand access to testbeds, labs, demonstrators, innovation districts and prototyping infrastructures for CCIs.
- Encourage portfolio-based innovation logic rather than isolated projects.
- Fund and strengthen intermediaries that cities rely on to mobilise cross-sector collaboration.
- Support cities in conducting ecosystem inventories to identify actors, gaps and innovation assets.
- Create FP10 mechanisms enabling CCIs to participate in experimentation infrastructures normally reserved for tech-centric actors.

3.3 Ecosystem building blocks - Open innovation a standard practice - powered by S3 and CCI Strategies

ekip presenter RAGNAR SIIL – Creativity Lab

With Guest HARALD HARTUNG, author of "Unleashing the Potential of the CCI" and former HEAD OF UNIT DG RTD

With Friends WOLFGANG MÜNCH DG REGIO EC, and ANNA SPECHTENHAUSER Stuttgart Region/ERRIN

ekip panellist LENNART STOY – Technopolis Group

ekip moderator PAUL HEKKERT

Key questions:

- How can Smart Specialization (S3) strategies strengthen innovation capacity in the CCIs?
- How can the policy work of *ekip* support the development of national and regional CCI strategies?
- How can the CCIs be part of bridging "Impact, Relevance and Good for humans"¹⁶ in the new framework?
- How can Open Innovation as a standard practice and norm in ecosystems create innovation capacity for the CCIs?

Strengthening innovation ecosystems so they can fully integrate the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) requires aligning open-innovation practices with regional and national strategies. Insights from the *ekip* Engine show that Smart Specialisation (S3)¹⁷ strategies offer an important entry point for reinforcing CCI-driven innovation capacity by connecting cultural expertise with broader economic and societal priorities. As ecosystems face increasing complexity, open innovation must become a standard practice that enables diverse actors—including CCIs—to engage meaningfully in early-stage experimentation, collaborative sense-making, and cross-sector problem-solving.

The policy work of *ekip* supports the development of national and regional CCI strategies, helping regions understand how cultural and creative competencies contribute to emerging transitions in areas such as resilience, infrastructures, and funding models. As Europe prepares new frameworks, CCIs offer essential

¹⁶ <https://sciencebusiness.net/report/human-values-and-grand-challenges-ssah-contributions-european-transformations-and-resilience>

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/s3-community-of-practice/about_en

capacities for interpreting societal needs, engaging users, and shaping innovation trajectories that reflect democratic and cultural values. By embedding open-innovation principles into the everyday functioning of ecosystems and aligning S3 and CCI strategies, regions can build the structures, policies and capabilities required to unlock the full innovation potential of the CCIs and strengthen Europe's long-term competitiveness and societal resilience.

Key implications for future EU R&I programmes:

- Align Smart Specialisation (S3) and CCI strategies to create coherent innovation ecosystems.
- Embed open-innovation principles as a standard practice across FP10 calls.
- Reform ecosystem building blocks (funding, infrastructures, intermediaries, evaluation) to enable CCI participation.
- Expand ERA participation for CCIs by supporting cross-border cultural-innovation ecosystems.
- Use foresight-driven processes (such as the *ekip* Engine) to identify system needs early.

3.4 Financing Europe's most transformative asset - New funding models for creativity and innovation - *ekip* beyond 2026

ekip presenter JEROEN VAN DER AA – TU Delft

With Guest CHRISTIAN EHLER MP EP

With Friends ALBERTO MINA CEO Milano Innovation District, and ANNE-MARIE SASSEN Head of Unit at EIC

ekip panellist MICHALIS STANGOS – MSCOMM

ekip moderator VALENTINA AURRICHIO - Politecnico di Milan

Key questions:

- How can Europe better fund and integrate the transformative power of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) in future innovation programs?
- How can the CCIs transformative skills be integrated into the new EU framework program?
- How can the CCIs be part of bridging "Impact, Relevance and Good for humans" in the new framework?
- How can ecosystems secure the capacity to integrate CCIs into innovation processes?
- What value can *ekip* provide to the European Commission, CCI platforms, "CCI Cities", and other actors, and what role could it play as a future innovation platform?

Europe's ability to harness the transformative power of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) depends on developing funding models that recognise their strategic role in shaping future innovation ecosystems. As CCIs contribute essential capacities—from early-stage experimentation to user engagement and meaning-making—the next EU framework programme must integrate these skills more systematically into its structures and instruments. This requires funding approaches that acknowledge CCIs as core contributors to innovation, not peripheral actors, and that strengthen the capacity of ecosystems to involve them in cross-sector processes.

To achieve this, new mechanisms are needed that lower entry barriers for creative actors, provide access to infrastructures such as testbeds and innovation labs, and support the intermediaries that connect CCIs with other sectors. Ensuring that CCIs can participate meaningfully in innovation also demands long-term investment in ecosystem capabilities, including the skills, coordination structures and collaborative environments that CCIs rely on. As Europe moves into a new phase of research and innovation

programming, *ekip* offers valuable added capacity through its open-innovation policy development Engine and its role as a platform for generating evidence-based recommendations and strengthening cross-sector collaboration. By adopting funding models that reflect the full value of CCIs and the infrastructures that enable them, Europe can secure the transformative potential of creativity and ensure that innovation processes remain relevant, human-centred and future-resilient.

Key implications for future EU R&I programmes:

- Include CCIs across all four European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) investment windows.
- Support resilience and cross-sector innovation areas such as AI for creative workflows, immersive media, circular design and cultural participation.
- Increase long-term investment in bridge-builders that connect culture, science, technology and public actors.
- Provide lower-barrier funding and access mechanisms for swarms of creative micro-enterprises.
- Develop sustainable innovation infrastructures for CCIs, including labs, prototyping facilities and shared spaces.

Annex: Detailed Policy Recommendations for Future R&I Programmes

On 16 July, the European Commission presented its proposal for the next Research and Innovation Framework Programme HORZION EUROPE 2028-2034 as part of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (here called FP10). Setting the course not only for joint efforts but also acting as a compass for initiatives on national, regional and local levels its design has vast implications for how the Open Innovation 3.0 policy recommendations put forward by *ekip* can be implemented.

Below a summary is made of suggestions for the future development of EU R&I programmes based on recommendations resulting from the *ekip* Engine process. They include implication for the four pillars in FP10, governance, thematic areas, and measurement approaches. The recommendations are all based on an overall suggestion to recognise CCIs as strategic contributors to European R&I and strengthen CCI participation in decision-making.

The recommendations presented in this section are directly derived from the four thematic areas explored during the *ekip* High-Level Policy Event. Each theme revealed system-level bottlenecks—ranging from limited cross-innovation capacity and fragmented infrastructures to weak alignment between S3 and CCI strategies and outdated funding models. This section translates those insights into structural recommendations and together, they demonstrate how R&I programmes can mainstream cultural and creative intelligence into Europe's future innovation architecture.

Implications for the Four FP10 Pillars

Pillar 1 – Excellent Science: FP10 should expand the definition of scientific excellence to integrate arts, humanities and practice-based research methods. These areas bring interpretative depth, ethical reflection, and societal contextualisation, strengthening Europe's capacity for responsible research and innovation. Practice-based design research and artistic experimentation should become eligible and recognised scientific methods.

Pillar 2 – Competitiveness & Society: CCIs contribute to Europe's competitiveness through cultural AI, eco-design, gaming, immersive media, sustainable fashion, and more. Yet evaluation mechanisms still privilege industrial and technological outputs over cultural and social value. To align with societal needs, FP10 must include metrics that capture creative, cultural, and community-level impacts. It is also important to provide mechanisms that enhance flexibility. *ekip* provides a proven foresight-driven policy development Engine that can be applied in many areas and networks to capture both challenges and opportunities, and for driving competence development among policy workers at different levels.

Pillar 3 – Innovation: Open innovation must become standard practice. CCIs play essential roles in early stages where experimentation, user feedback, and meaning-making in portfolios of initiatives are critical. FP10 should provide dedicated access points for CCIs to testbeds, experimentation infrastructures, demonstrators, innovation labs, innovation districts, regulatory sandboxes and other innovation ecosystem building blocks. This also includes increase the capacity and capability of CCI infrastructures to become more oriented towards innovation¹⁸. In this work, universities have a key role for bringing stakeholders together and providing research-based development.

Pillar 4 – European Research Area (ERA): CCIs are natural agents of widening participation, brain circulation, and regional development. Their collaborative practices support cross-border ecosystems and strengthen the cultural dimension of ERA.

¹⁸ <https://ekipengine.eu/bringing-communities-together-to-tackle-complex-challenges/>

Key Governance Recommendations for R&I Programmes

Bridge the divide between cultural and innovation policy frameworks: Create governance mechanisms that intentionally connect cultural and innovation policies, which currently operate on different logics: cultural policy focuses on who is eligible to shape cultural value, while innovation policy prioritises scalable outputs and economic impact. This divide prevents many creative actors from accessing innovation infrastructures and limits their ability to contribute to Europe's wider innovation capacity.

Strengthen CCI Participation in Decision-Making: Create formal CCI representation within R&I programmes, especially within committees overseeing Pillar 2 in FP10. This ensures that societal and cultural perspectives inform strategic direction.

Reform innovation ecosystem building blocks: Adjust and develop current innovation ecosystem building blocks to better suit open innovation and the participation of the CCIs, based on the policy recommendations from *ekip*.

Introduce Tailored Access Mechanisms for CCIs including

- Adjusted evaluation criteria recognising cultural and creative impacts.
- Support for cross-sector matchmaking.
- Guidance for forming balanced innovation consortia.
- Shift focus from unicorns to swarms of organisations.

Support Bridge-Builders at EU Level: Bridge-builders—organisations that translate between science, culture, technology, and public policy—play vital roles in cross-sector innovation. R&I programmes should map, connect, and systematically fund such actors.

Create stronger alignment between S3 strategies and CCI strategies: Cultural and innovation policy need to be handled together and one way of doing that is to create mechanisms that align S3 strategies and CCI strategies and the funding that it entails.

Strengthen Resilience and Cross-Sectoral Innovation Pathways: Fields such as AI, immersive media, and mission-driven innovation demand cultural and creative integration. Therefore, CCIs should be formally recognised as strategic contributors.

Acknowledge CCIs in the ECF Policy Investment Windows: In the current European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) proposal, CCIs are only mentioned in relation to the digital leadership window. The CCIs need to be systematically included across the four ECF investment windows, since they are relevant to all the four windows.

Leverage Regulatory Sandboxes with the CCIs: Regulatory sandboxes offer a structured, real-world test environment where new creative, and cross-sector innovations can be developed under safe, temporary regulatory conditions. To be effective, sandboxes must be designed to include CCI actors, connect to other policy tools, and ensure that results can scale across regions and sectors. Incorporating sandboxes systematically into EU programmes would strengthen experimentation, evidence-based policymaking, and long-term innovation capacity.

Recommended Thematic Areas for FP10

Based on the work using the *ekip* Engine, the following areas are especially recommended for the FP10:

AI for Creative Workflows and Cultural Intelligence: AI can accelerate creative processes, support cultural preservation, and expand innovation in content creation, design and user engagement.

Ecodesign and Sustainable Production: Europe's green transition requires creative contributions in areas such as circular fashion, digital product passports, and sustainable materials.

Immersive Media and Gaming: These emerging fields position Europe as a global leader in creative technologies while supporting cross-sector applications in education, health, culture and industry.

Cultural Participation, Social Inclusion and Democratic Resilience: Innovation must strengthen democracy. CCIs play essential roles in public engagement, storytelling, and fostering trust.

New European Bauhaus: Creative and cultural expertise is central to linking sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusivity. This also include initiatives focusing the sustainability challenges within the CCIs, where innovation also can create a spill-over to other areas¹⁹.

Measuring Impact: A Critical Challenge

Currently, there are few, if any, relevant indicators available to interpret the added value of cross-sectoral collaborations for innovation between cultural and creative sectors and other domains. It is difficult to properly measure the impact of such collaborations between CCI, science and other innovation actors, as this impact is often of a not very tangible nature and can only be observed in the long term. Thus, future calls should focus on:

- Identifying and mapping methodologies that have been used to measure impact of cross-sectoral collaboration with CCI for innovation and extract the learning lessons.
- Research possible new ways of measuring impact in these types of collaborations.
- Research to what extent (the effects of) these collaborations can be captured by indicators in the EU Innovation Scoreboard.

The role of “bridge-builders” to stimulate research and innovation with cultural and creative sectors

Increasingly, scientists, technologists and companies are teaming up with artists, cultural workers and creative professionals in innovative projects. Collaborations at the interface between science, culture and innovation can offer new perspectives to tackle important (societal) issues. At the European level, cross-sectoral cooperation with the arts and culture has received extra stimulation in recent years. Policy initiatives such as S+T+ARTS²⁰ and the New European Bauhaus²¹ explicitly focus on cooperation between science, technology and the cultural and creative sectors to develop and promote more creative, inclusive and sustainable technologies. However, there are still several weaknesses when it comes to stimulating these innovative crossover collaborations:

- Support structures and networks committed to cross-sectoral collaborations between the CCI and other innovation actors are limited, fragile and poorly interconnected.
- Cultural and creative actors are often not perceived as innovation actors by other sectors, government and science, and thus not considered as part of innovation ecosystems
- Not much integrated policy across policy domains around cross-sectoral innovation.
- Lack of financial instruments that support more structurally cross-sectoral collaborations for innovation.
- Few, if any, relevant indicators available to interpret the added value of cross-sectoral collaborations on innovation.

¹⁹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Creative shifts – Empowering culture for sustainable living, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/6678618>

²⁰ <https://starts.eu>

²¹ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en

- Lack of mutual knowledge, methodological differences, and jargon barriers between cultural and scientific and innovation actors.

In various cities, regions, countries in Europe several initiatives, usually bottom-up created, play a role as a so called "bridge-builder", by providing spaces, sometimes funding, expertise or a shared network across various domains and act as translator between organisations and professionals in the cultural and creative sectors on the one hand and research institutions, companies, non-profit organisations and governments on the other hand. They often hold valuable expertise on how to stimulate cross-sectoral innovation. Thus, future R&I programmes should focus on:

- Mapping and identifying these good practices and making them more well known to other innovation actors in the quadruple helix (e.g. where relevant integrate them in existing platforms, such as on research infrastructures in Europe).
- Linking these "bridge builders" to stimulate cooperation across borders.
- Learning from these grassroots initiatives, by mapping methodologies and make their expertise EU-wide known.
- Creating lasting networks and platforms.

In the report "Unleashing the potential of the cultural and creative industries"²²(2025), Harald Hartung argues for the gradual building up of a collaborative platform to set up strong and inclusive networks of CCSIs in Europe.

"It should lay the foundations for bringing together creative companies and professions, making them work together on key issues related to creativity and innovation. This will create bridges and crossover effects to make other economic sectors profit from the innovation capacity, growth potential and competitive edge of the creative sector. The creation of a European collaborative platform for CCSIs is thus a key point in the EU's R&I actions for the CCIs." (p. 53)

However, for such a platform to be powerful it also needs to be accompanied by a mechanism that continuously works with strategic foresight-oriented CCI innovation policy development, to make use of challenges and opportunities. According to Hartung (p. 63) "ekip has the potential to become an important element in an overarching EU-wide CCI ecosystem, with a focus on pooling and transforming research outputs into policy recommendations and on further nurturing research into and on behalf of CCIs"

Alignment with the EU Competitiveness and Cultural Compasses

The EU Competitiveness Compass²³ is the European Commission's roadmap for restoring Europe's economic dynamism by boosting innovation, accelerating decarbonisation, and reducing strategic dependencies, based on the framework presented in January 2025. The EU Cultural Compass²⁴ is the EU's new strategic framework for cultural policy, setting out four key directions to strengthen cultural rights, empower cultural professionals, enhance cultural competitiveness and cohesion, and deepen international cultural relations.

Both compasses share a strategic, future-oriented approach, aim to reinforce Europe's resilience, promote innovation and digital transformation, address structural barriers, strengthen Europe's global standing, invest in people and talent, and rely on monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation. The policy recommendations put forward above, directly reinforce both these compasses.

²² <https://knowledge-bank.ekipengine.eu/resource/unleashing-the-potential-of-the-cultural-and-creative-industries/>

²³ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/competitiveness-compass_en

²⁴ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-compass>

The EU Competitiveness Compass

The EU Competitiveness Compass provides the Commission's roadmap for restoring Europe's economic dynamism by boosting innovation, accelerating decarbonisation, and reducing strategic dependencies. It identifies closing the innovation gap, increasing technological adoption, strengthening start-up and scale-up environments, and supporting sustainable growth as core priorities. The *ekip* recommendations strongly align with—and in several cases directly operationalise—these priorities.

First, the Competitiveness Compass emphasises the need to close Europe's innovation gap and strengthen early-stage innovation capacity. The *ekip* recommendations advance this by recognising CCIs as strategic innovation actors and proposing targeted mechanisms such as tailored access points and CCI-appropriate evaluation criteria, enabling thousands of creative micro-enterprises to contribute to innovation pipelines. This broadens the EU's innovation base in line with the Compass' call for an expanded, more dynamic innovation ecosystem.

Second, the Compass stresses the importance of supportive infrastructures and an environment where companies can adopt new technologies and collaborate across borders. *ekip*'s proposals to reform ecosystem building blocks, expand access to testbeds, labs and prototyping facilities, and strengthen intermediaries and bridge-builders directly support this objective. By enabling CCIs to operate within shared infrastructures, *ekip* contributes to the EU's ambition to boost technological diffusion and reduce fragmentation in innovation support systems.

Third, the Competitiveness Compass highlights decarbonisation and resilience as key components of future competitiveness. *ekip*'s thematic areas—such as ecodesign, circular production, and cultural participation in green transitions—introduce culturally anchored pathways that complement the EU's economic and industrial measures. The recommendations demonstrate how CCIs contribute to behavioural change, public engagement, and value-driven innovation—essential for accelerating green transitions envisioned in the Compass.

Fourth, both frameworks emphasise reducing structural dependencies and building strategic capabilities. *ekip* advances this by calling for long-term investment in cross-sector intermediaries that connect culture, technology, science and public actors. These organisations strengthen Europe's capacity to innovate domestically and reduce dependency on external innovation impulses.

Finally, the Competitiveness Compass underscores the need to support skills, talent and high-quality jobs as foundations for competitiveness. *ekip*'s recommendations to empower creative professionals, improve access to funding, and embed CCIs in governance mechanisms closely match this priority. CCIs represent a major skills base in design, digital content, user engagement and creativity—competences the EU recognises as central to economic renewal.

The Cultural Compass

The EU Cultural Compass establishes four key directions for strengthening Europe's cultural and creative landscape: safeguarding cultural rights and values, empowering artists and cultural professionals, leveraging culture for competitiveness and cohesion, and reinforcing international cultural relations. These priorities reflect a long-term vision to position culture at the centre of EU policymaking, supported by flagship actions including improved working conditions, enhanced access to culture, strengthened evidence infrastructures, and coordinated European and international partnerships.

The policy recommendations presented in this brief directly reinforce this strategic vision by offering actionable, innovation-driven mechanisms that can operationalise the Compass within EU Research & Innovation frameworks. They strengthen cultural rights and democratic engagement through advocating open innovation processes that embed participation, meaning-making and user-centred approaches into ecosystem development. The recommendations also respond to the Compass' call to empower cultural

professionals by proposing tailored access mechanisms and adjusted evaluation criteria that reduce barriers for CCIs and acknowledge their cultural and societal contributions.

In line with the Compass' emphasis on culture-driven competitiveness and resilience, the *ekip* framework demonstrates how CCIs drive innovation in areas such as AI, circularity, immersive media and societal transitions, and highlights the need to reform innovation ecosystem building blocks to enable cross-sector collaboration. Taken together, the evidence-based methods and ecosystem-oriented policy tools put forward provide a concrete implementation pathway for the EU Cultural Compass. They translate the Compass' strategic ambitions into practical processes that enhance cultural participation, improve working conditions in the CCIs, accelerate cross-sector innovation and strengthen Europe's cultural resilience and global cultural leadership.

Conclusion

The European R&I frameworks, programmes and measurements must harness Europe's cultural and creative intelligence to achieve scientific excellence, competitiveness, societal well-being and democratic renewal. This strategic shift can be achieved by embedding open innovation, recognising CCIs as cross-cutting enablers, and reforming governance and evaluation structures accordingly. *ekip* stands ready to contribute to creating a framework that fully reflects Europe's cultural strengths and innovation potential.