



# EKIP HIGH-LEVEL INNOVATION POLICY EVENT, BRUSSELS

## 4 MAY 2026

**Conclusions, reflections,  
and recommendations**  
on how innovation  
ecosystems can be  
advanced with the Cultural  
and Creative Industries



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Blankspace, Brussels 4 May 2026

# Stronger ecosystems start here: bringing CCIs into the core of innovation policy

**ekip exists to close a critical gap in Europe's innovation ecosystems. Too often, innovation policy overlooks the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) — despite their proven ability to connect technology, society, and culture. We believe the CCIs are not an add-on, but the missing piece needed to unlock stronger, more resilient and competitive ecosystems.**

Creatives are not "nice to have". They are essential. Their skills in sense-making, experimentation, design, storytelling, and collaboration are crucial when tackling complex challenges such as the green transition, digital transformation, and social inclusion. These transitions demand innovation processes that cut across sectors, disciplines, and interests — exactly where creative competences thrive.

ekip is rooted in open and cross-sector innovation, and we bring together policymakers, creatives, researchers, industry, and civil society to co-create evidence-based policy recommendations. Our goal is clear: to shape smarter policies where collaboration is the norm, not the exception — and where CCIs are empowered to act as drivers of innovation, not just contributors.

At the heart of this work is the ekip Engine — a structured yet flexible process designed to turn collective intelligence into actionable policy. Through co-creation, the Engine sparks engagement, builds shared understanding, gathers feedback, and enables people to actively shape policies that drive societal change through disruptive innovation across ecosystems in Europe.

Instead of chasing a single unicorn, ekip cultivates the co-creation strength and dynamic spirit of the "swarm" that defines the creative community. We work to make open innovation the norm and the force that is needed to successfully create transformative and complex innovation.

The community around ekip is growing and, through its different stakeholder groups, it is becoming a community of communities and an ecosystem of ecosystems. With its website and Knowledge Bank, featuring articles, cases, policy recommendations, tools and analyses, ekip is becoming a platform for information and inspiration — a go-to place where people can explore how to work with innovation in their context, community, ecosystem, region and country.

The different policy recommendations on ecosystem building blocks now reveal a

number of interesting patterns. Together with the data from the ecosystem inventories, they strengthen the findings and clarify where attention should be focused when developing open innovation ecosystems.

The focus should be on enabling a desirable future where the CCIs play a central role in creating tomorrow's solutions and driving major transformations. Together with the identified new jobs and the personas working with this in the future, we can already grasp the future: "Innovation Village People".

*Innovation is about people!  
And this is what ekip is about – bringing people together to create the future we want.*

**Charlotte Lorentz Hjorth**  
ekip Coordinator  
Lund University

— EKIP · INNOVATION POLICY PLATFORM

## European Cultural & Creative Industries Innovation Policy Platform

**01 ENGAGE**

**Networks of networks.**

*How can you be involved?*



**02 EXPLORE**

**Content collector and distributor.**

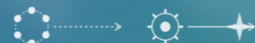
*What do we produce?*



**03 DISCOVER**

**Community-centred policy engine.**

*How do we work?*



## Let's make sure that Europe's most powerful asset for competitiveness will be a driver across ecosystems!

**For all the language of competitiveness and technological sovereignty, Europe's innovation policy still underuses one of its strongest capabilities: its Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs). Not as a niche sector, but as a force shaping how innovation happens.**

If Europe is serious about future-ready innovation ecosystems, CCIs must move to the core. That requires structural change across five fronts put forward by ekip.

### **First, embed CCIs across EU programmes horizontally and vertically.**

CCIs should be integrated in budgets across FP10 and relevant MFF programmes. This means horizontal inclusion across all domains and vertical integration within key programmes strands, like Cluster 2, investing in CCIs' sustainability while driving transformation in other sectors.

### **Second, break down policy silos through a cross-policy approach.**

Cultural and innovation policies still run in parallel. Bridging them requires shared frameworks, strategic concepts like "innovation driven by cultural production". Combined with joint priority-setting across Windows and co-financing dual funding at EU and Member State level, this enables lasting cross-sector programmes.

### **Third, redesign ecosystems around Open Innovation logic with sufficient building blocks.**

CCIs offer new pathways to innovation, through networks, iteration, and experimentation in

collaborative processes. Europe's ecosystems building blocks must reflect this. Aligning funding, infrastructure, and regulation with Open Innovation would give CCIs access and possibility to contribute at full capacity to the competitiveness of Europe.

### **Fourth, shift from projects to innovation portfolio-based investment.**

Fragmented funding limits impact and economic sustainability. Portfolio approaches enabling partnerships solving complex challenges and achieving radical innovation, scale and risk-sharing. This requires strong intermediaries to orchestrate cross-innovation, connect sectors, alongside financing models with higher risk tolerance, blended structures, and metrics that recognise creativity-led innovation.

### **Fifth, establish a permanent foresight innovation policy engine.**

Reactive policy is insufficient. Europe needs continuous foresight processes bringing together CCIs, researchers, industry, and policymakers to anticipate change and act early. A demand - driven engine requested by a community of ecosystems across Europe.

### **From recognition to realignment**

The issue is not recognising CCI's value, but embedding it structurally. This is less about supporting a sector than redefining innovation itself — placing creativity, experimentation, and culture at its centre.

### **Read ekip's five recommendations on page 31**



**The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) already constitute a significant component of the European Union's strategic agenda, both as a major sector in their own right and through their contribution to the development and transformation of other sectors.**

Employing more than seven million people across the Union, CCIs represent a powerful – yet still underutilised – European asset at a time when Europe faces accelerating climate urgency, rapid digital transformation, geopolitical instability, and increasing societal fragmentation. As the EU shapes its next Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP10) and advances the Competitiveness Compass, it is making decisive commitments in areas such as deep tech, artificial intelligence, climate neutrality, and technological sovereignty. Yet, a growing challenge persists: innovations of increasing technical sophistication often struggle with adoption, legitimacy, trust, and societal embedding – factors that are now central determinants of Europe's competitiveness, security, and democratic resilience.

Addressing these challenges requires a shift from linear models to collaborative, open innovation ecosystems. Stronger partnerships between universities, research organisations, industry, public authorities, and CCIs are essential, with universities providing stability and continuity for this otherwise dynamic and fast-moving sector. Acting as active co-creation partners, they enable more experimental, inclusive, and iterative approaches that enhance both the relevance and societal anchoring of innovation.

### **Innovation capacity**

CCIs bring essential capacities in cultural and creative intelligence, including visioning capacity, meaning-making, human-centred design, participatory innovation, and the ability to work across disciplines and sectors. These capabilities are critical in open innovation environments, where diverse actors collaborate to frame challenges, test solutions, and align technological development with societal expectations.

Evidence from experimentation across Europe demonstrates that when CCIs are integrated early and structurally into such multi-actor ecosystems – together with universities, industry, civil society and public sector actors – they significantly increase the adoption and diffusion of advanced

technologies, strengthen democratic legitimacy and societal ownership of major transitions, and enhance resilience in the face of systemic and hybrid risks. These capacities are directly relevant across FP10 clusters and missions.

In health, collaborative approaches involving CCIs, research institutions, and healthcare actors support people-centred and prevention-oriented systems. In culture, creativity and inclusive society, they contribute to participatory processes that strengthen civic engagement and social cohesion.

In civil security cross-sector collaboration improves the usability and trustworthiness of technologies and preparedness measures. In digital, industry and space, it enables the co-design of AI systems, interfaces, and data governance aligned with European values. In climate, energy and mobility, it facilitates place-based transitions through stakeholder engagement, behavioural change, and local ownership.

### **Cross-innovation**

Across FP10 missions, Open Innovation practices supported by Cultural and Creative Intelligence can reduce systemic risk by enabling portfolio-based experimentation, real-world testing and continuous societal feedback. These approaches help test ideas in context, adapt them over time and strengthen the relevance and uptake of mission-oriented innovation.

More coherent, targeted and forward-looking policies across governance levels can help cultural and creative industries strengthen cross-innovation processes. By connecting cultural, industrial, digital, regional and research agendas, policy coherence can make creative capabilities contribute more directly to broader innovation goals.

This requires stronger integration of CCIs into Horizon Europe, Smart Specialisation Strategies and digital and AI policy frameworks, where co-creation, design thinking and interdisciplinary

### **Event purpose**

Against this backdrop, ekip – the European Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Policy Platform – has developed and tested an open-innovation-based policy engine demonstrating why CCIs must play a central role in European research and innovation initiatives.

Since 2023, the ekip Engine has delivered foresight-oriented, data-driven policy recommendations aimed at reshaping innovation ecosystems by strengthening collaboration across sectors and governance levels, and by enabling more inclusive and participatory innovation processes.

### **The High-Level Policy Event “Shifting How Innovation Policy Works in Europe” represents a key milestone in this work.**

Organised by ekip together with leading stakeholders from across the European innovation ecosystem – including academia, research organisations, industry, public institutions, and the creative sector – and preceded by the campaign “Creatives being the missing piece: an untapped force to reset ecosystems”, the event brought together experts, policymakers, and practitioners to explore critical challenges and opportunities for the future of European innovation policy.

Structured around four thematic sessions, the event aimed to foster dialogue, generate insights, and identify concrete ways to move forward – placing Cultural and Creative Intelligence within open, collaborative innovation ecosystems at the heart of Europe's future.

### **The ekip High-Level Policy Event “Shifting How Innovation Works in Europe” was divided into four consecutive and interrelated sessions. Prior to the event, briefing material was provided with information about the topics, questions and speakers.**



• 10:00 • SESSION 01

# Rethinking Foundations

Recognising cultural production as a core driver of innovation, not a peripheral sector to support.



**GUEST KEYNOTE**  
**Martin Hojsik**  
Vice-President  
European Parliament

**MODERATOR**  
**Isabelle De Voldere**  
Moderator  
IDEA

**PRESENTER**  
**Charlotte Lorentz Hjorth**  
Presenter  
Lund University

**PANELLIST**  
**Marcin Poprawski**  
Panellist  
HUMAK

**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Pilar Aguar Fernandez**  
Director  
EC DG RTD

**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Toni Attard**  
Director  
Culture Venture

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**At the first ekip session in Brussels,** moderated by Isabelle De Voldere, we explored this tension with Martin Hojsik, Maria Pilar Aguar Fernandez, Toni Attard and Marcin Poprawski.

It resulted in many ideas worth spreading:

Europe cannot compete by being the cheapest. As Vice-President of the European Parliament, Martin Hojsik put it, Europe must create the kind of value "that no one else does." The challenge is ensuring the next MFF becomes an enabler for this, not a wall.

Toni Attard named a tension that many cultural actors live with daily. It is hard to engage in innovation work when the fundamental questions are still: "Do I have a space to create?" and "Will I earn an income consistently?" Europe repeatedly calls on culture in moments of crisis, yet cultural policy and innovation policy still run in parallel rather than together.

Marcin Poprawski, from Humak University of Applied Sciences, argued that bridging these effectively is only possible when anchored in mutual trust, respect, transparency of intentions. Through ekip, we see that more city policymakers understand this and envision new synapses for cross-innovation driven by CCI actors as professional users of imagination. Charlotte Lorentz Hjorth, ekip's coordinator, introduced one of the concepts supporting this: "innovation through cultural production."

Maria Pilar Aguar Fernandez, Director for "People – Health and Society" at EC

DG Research and Innovation, pointed to healthcare as a sector where cross-innovation with CCIs is already producing results, a concrete signal of what becomes possible when connectivity exists.

Because the issue is not a lack of creativity. The issue is a lack of connectivity across sectors, institutions, policy frameworks and ways of working.

This is the core idea behind ekip: moving from isolated projects to connected ecosystems. Innovation through collaboration, cultural production, experimentation, and shared infrastructure.

We know the creatives matter for innovation. The question is, how does Europe choose to build with them?

**Session 1: How do we redesign innovation ecosystems so that Cultural and Creative Industries are not treated as peripheral actors, but as part of the core architectures of competitiveness, transition, and societal transformation?**

The session also highlighted that CCIs are strong but under-recognised innovation actors, held back by the divide between cultural and innovation policy.



## Cultural and creative industries a cornerstone

**Martin Hojsik, Vice-President of the European Parliament, sees cultural and creative industries as a cornerstone of Europe's sustainable and competitive future.**

"Policy must focus on creating enabling environments," Martin Hojsik says. "Creative industries cannot thrive as isolated initiatives. They need ecosystems where culture connects with manufacturing, academia, and real market opportunities."

He points to the coming negotiations on the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework as a critical moment.

"This is where Europe can make a real difference. We need a strong, common framework so that support for the CCIs does not depend solely on national decisions."

For Martin Hojsik, competitiveness must be understood more broadly.

"It's not only about financial returns. Creativity and culture bring added value that is essential to Europe's resilience, and this must be reflected across instruments like the European Competitiveness Fund."

He also challenges the idea that innovation conflicts with cultural heritage.

"Heritage is not static. By rediscovering forgotten techniques and knowledge, we can inspire sustainable solutions for the future."

Europe's path forward, Martin Hojsik concludes, lies in building on its past while confidently shaping what comes next.



Martin Hojsik, Vice-President of the European Parliament



"Subsidising culture, I hear this very often in my work, is the wrong starting point. We need to stop saying this, and we need to stop others from saying it too.

We are not subsidising Cultural and Creative Industries. We are investing in the future of Europe. These are investments in our society and in Europe's future.

It is our responsibility to change that mentality. Cultural and Creative Industries are not on the margins of innovation. They are the missing pieces at its centre. They are a superpower that Europe has. The future is on the make now, and we all have a responsibility to help make it the best possible future."

Maria Pilar Maria Pilar Aguar Fernandez, Director for "People - Health and Society" at EC DG Research and Innovation



• 11:00 • SESSION 02

# From Ideas to Investment

Translating creative capacity into investable portfolios, city prototypes and ecosystem structures.



**GUEST KEYNOTE**  
**Felipe Buitrago**  
Creative Economy  
WIPO



**MODERATOR**  
**Charlotte Lorentz Hjorth**  
Moderator  
Lund University



**PRESENTER**  
**Katarina Scott**  
Presenter  
Future by Lund



**PANELLIST**  
**Zora Jourova**  
Panellist  
HUMAK



**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Anette Schaefer**  
CEO  
EIT Culture & Creativity



**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Mark van Iterson**  
Chair  
Association of Dutch Designers



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Session 2: Investable innovation portfolios - city prototyping and ecosystem inventories: Showed 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.

## How do we make creative innovation investible?

The first session of our Brussels event explored why Cultural and Creative Industries matter for Europe's innovation future; Session 2 focused on something operational.

One thing became very clear: Europe does not lack creativity. What we lack are the structures, ecosystems, and organising logic that allow creative innovation to grow into long-term innovation capacity.

Part of the problem is that we are still evaluating creative ecosystems through frameworks designed for completely different industries.

Felipe Buitrago from World Intellectual Property Organization – WIPO framed this tension: "For 30 years, output metrics have been very important for visibility of the creative economy, but they have failed to help us understand the conditions, the environment, and the ecosystem in which creativity happens."

And perhaps that is the real challenge, as Felipe continued: "A creative is going to create whether there is a ministry of culture or not, whether there is a financing mechanism or not. The difference is whether these tools are properly aligned; then the value of the creator in society and the economy becomes much larger."

Katarina Scott, from Future by Lund, pushed the discussion even further by asking: "What if we could activate the innovation power of the CCI at scale?"

But scaling creative innovation cannot happen through traditional industrial models alone.

CCIs operate differently: through networks, experimentation, temporary collaborations, and ecosystems. What ekip describes as "swarming": self-organising, iterative forms of collaboration that move quickly and draw strength from Europe's diversity.

Anette Schaefer, CEO of EIT Culture & Creativity, reflected on the potential of CCIs to contribute to transformative innovation portfolios, connecting strongly with the logic behind ekip's City Prototyping work.

At the same time, cities emerged as a particularly important layer in this discussion.

As Zora Jourová from Bratislava reflected: "When we are talking about policies, cities can save the policymaking process itself by having the ability to create trust. Cities are close to people." Trust and proximity are what most innovation systems are missing today.

The CCIs have something important to offer Europe: new ways of organising innovation itself.

Mark Van Iterson, Former Global Design Director at Heineken and now Chair of Beroepsorganisatie Nederlandse Ontwerpers (BNO), also highlighted how important the skills, perspective, and status of the CCI community are for large corporations and for the attractiveness of places themselves.





Anette Schaefer, CEO of EIT Culture and Creativity

## Cities Pave the Way

**Anette Schaefer, CEO of EIT Culture and Creativity, calls for a shift in how cities think about transformation, and lifts a portfolio approach, as ekip have been initiating in the City Prototyping in +20 cities across Europe.**

"We need to move from a project-based to a prototyping-based approach," she says, describing EIT CC's role as bringing "different stakeholders, the cities, the regions, the investors to the same table to scale initiatives and build a portfolio approach."

She points to Torino's former automotive site, now a creative district, as a benchmark that cities should study.

"All the cities in our network need to listen and learn from each other, and that is where EIT CC comes in to support these conversations and knowledge transfers."

ekip's Knowledge Bank with collected data on CCI innovation policy will also be a resource for cities designing their journey to develop the ecosystems.

In cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam, the question is no longer attraction but retention, how to keep creative talent as living costs climb. Mid-sized cities like Vaasa in Finland offer a different path: "good universities, good housing and a quality of life where creatives can actually thrive."

Measuring success, she insists, needs to evolve.

"We need soft KPIs as well as hard KPIs, not just measured with money, but with how many people stay in those places."

Cities also have a structural advantage.

"They can do a lot of things more agile than national structures," and EIT CC is always looking for more of them to join their network.



In the panel: Zora Jaurova, Felipe Bultrago, Anette Schaefer, Mark van Iterson

## “Innovation is not always rocket science”

### What Mark van Iterson thinks Europe still doesn't understand about creativity

Among discussions about AI, innovation, and Europe's economic future, one moment unexpectedly stood out: a conversation about pubs.

Mark van Iterson, former Global Design Director at Heineken and now Chair of the Association of Dutch Designers, was explaining how keeping small rural bars alive in France can indirectly reduce loneliness, strengthen social cohesion and even lower long-term healthcare costs.

“We often imagine innovation as rocket science,” he said. “But innovation can also be alcohol-free beer with a slightly different taste, in a slightly different can, suddenly opening an entirely new market.”

Mark Van Iterson arrived at the event mostly to listen.

“I'm mostly absorbing and learning everything that's going on,” he explained.

“And that's probably also important for policymakers to realise. People working in businesses, whether at Heineken, design agencies or elsewhere, are often not really aware of all the EU-level policy work happening around this.”

What surprised him was not only the scale of the discussions, but the sense that something larger was beginning to take shape across Europe. 21

“I'm positively surprised by the power that is sort of unleashing,” he said. “People from many different backgrounds, countries and professions are all putting their shoulders under elevating the cultural and creative industries. Creativity is fragile. You should really nurture the little seeds.”

For Mark van Iterson, is not simply about supporting a sector. He sees it as directly connected to Europe's broader position in the world.

“The more collectivist Asian cultures allow less individual creativity than our culture,” he argued. “And the highly competitive, short-term win-oriented American culture is also less stimulating for creativity.”

Europe, in his eyes, still holds a particular balance between social structure, experimentation and cultural imagination that creates fertile ground for creative thinking to emerge. And he believes that advantage is far more strategic than Europe currently acknowledges.

“We should acknowledge this not just for business and wealth,” he said, “but also to solve the big issues we have with the planet and society. Because in the end, it's about creating the world we want to live in.”

• 13:00 • SESSION 03

# From Policy to Practice

Where policy meets reality: smart specialisation, open innovation and regional CCI strategies in practice.



**GUEST KEYNOTE**  
**Harald Hartung**  
Author  
"Unleashing the Potential of the CCI"



**MODERATOR**  
**Paul Hekkert**  
Moderator  
ekip Validator



**PRESENTER**  
**Ragnar Siil**  
Presenter  
Creativity Lab



**PANELLIST**  
**Lennart Stoy**  
Panellist  
Technopolis Group



**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Wolfgang Münch**  
Senior Expert  
DG REGIO



**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Anna Spechtenhauser**  
Stuttgart Region  
ERRIN

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Session 3: Ecosystem building blocks  
- Open innovation a standard practice powered by S3 and CCI Strategies:

Stressed 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.

**Have you ever thought about how many brilliant ideas never become real innovations?** Not because they lack creativity, not because they lack talent, but because the ecosystem around them was never designed to support the way creativity actually works. This became one of the central discussions during Session 3 of our Brussels event: "From policy to practice: embedding CCIs in regional strategies."

Together with Paul Hekkert, Ragnar Siil, Harald Hartung, Wolfgang Münch, Anna Spechtenhauser and Lennart Stoy, we explored a deceptively simple question: What happens after policy recommendations are written? Policy only matters if it translates into action inside regions, cities, ecosystems, and everyday collaboration structures.

Perhaps the biggest "lightbulb moment" of the session was this: We still design many innovation systems around industrial logic, while expecting Cultural and Creative Industries to somehow fit inside them, but the CCIs do not innovate like traditional industries.

They innovate through experimentation, openness, networks, iteration, human insight, temporary collaborations, and cross-pollination between disciplines. Which means: if the ecosystem itself is not designed for this kind of collaboration, creativity remains trapped at the level of isolated projects instead of becoming long-term innovation capacity.

Harald Hartung, former Head of Unit for Fair Societies & Cultural Heritage & Cultural Heritage DG RTD and author of "Unleashing the Potential of the Cultural and Creative Industries", captured this brilliantly in his keynote when discussing why Europe must stop treating culture as a cost:

It is about meaning.

That line stayed with us because it reframes innovation itself. Innovation is not only about technological capability.

Anna Spechtenhauser, working at the Stuttgart Region European Office in Brussels and co-leading the ERRIN NEB and Creativity Working Group, argues that CCI industries must however be understood through real impact on the economy and everyday life.

"We need to make CCIs visible in practice, that their value becomes clearer when the impact on overall development is demonstrated through examples.

Anna Spechtenhauser also lifts that Innovation should build on existing knowledge and structures rather than start from scratch," she argues, stressing the importance of recognizing all stakeholders in the ecosystem.

Lennart Stoy from Technopolis Group and ekip partner, picks up on this and Ragnar Siil's, introduction that the key contribution of ekip is that we have moved beyond advocacy and into structure. With the policy recommendations, we have identified how the building blocks in ecosystems can be developed in order to include CCIs in existing ecosystems.

What is important is that these building blocks are directly applicable at national and regional level. They provide a way to move from supporting the cultural sector to activating creative capacity across the whole economy. And they highlight, that CCI strategies cannot sit in isolation. They need to be connected with:

- Research and innovation policy
- Regional development
- Education and skills
- Health and wellbeing
- Urban and territorial development

Smart specialisation has always been about identifying regional strengths and building competitive advantage. But in many regions, creative capacity is still not recognised as such a strength. Or it is recognised, but not operationalised.





In the panel:  
Wolfgang Münch, Lennart Stoy, Anna Spechtenhauser

## CCIs in Focus: Stuttgart Region

**Anna Spechtenhauser, working at the Stuttgart Region European Office in Brussels and co-leading the ERRIN NEB and Creativity Working Group, says CCI industries must be understood through real impact on the economy and everyday life.**

"We need to make CCIs visible in practice," she says, arguing that their value becomes clearer when the impact on overall development is demonstrated through examples.

The Stuttgart Region reflects this approach. Alongside automotive and engineering giants, the region's creative industries are an important economic pillar. Collaboration runs deep, uniting diverse partners, where designers and engineers co-create solutions for industrial challenges.

The CCI scene is visible in public life, from renowned events and conferences to numerous annual cultural festivals.

Anna also highlights the annual ERRIN EU Design Day in Brussels, where stakeholders from 12 European regions explore how design and creativity drive innovation. In 2026, the event will prioritize NEB, affordable housing and living, and the role of regions.

Rather than focusing only on "best practices," she sees value in learning from mistakes and broadening understanding of how different approaches inform future innovation.

"Innovation should build on existing knowledge and structures rather than start from scratch," she argues, stressing the importance of recognizing all stakeholders in the ecosystem.

This approach is entirely consistent with why ekip's innovation policy recommendations prioritise the development and reinforcement of existing structures within the innovation ecosystem.

Rather than advocating for wholly new frameworks, the focus is on strengthening and complementing the building blocks already in place—ensuring they are better connected, more responsive, and capable of supporting sustainable growth across the sector.

• 14:00 • SESSION 04

# Financing Transformation

Financing ecosystems, not just projects — and positioning ekip beyond 2026.



**QUEST KEYNOTE**  
**Christian Ehler**  
Member of European Parliament  
European Parliament



**MODERATOR**  
**Lena Holmberg**  
Moderator  
Lund University



**PRESENTER**  
**Jeroen van der Aa**  
Presenter  
TU Delft



**PANELLIST**  
**Michalis Stangos**  
President,  
L-Stone Capital  
MSCOMM



**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Michiel Scheffer**  
President of the Board  
European Innovation Council



**FRIEND PANELLIST**  
**Alberto Mina**  
CEO  
Milano Innovation District

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Session 4: Financing Europe's most transformative asset  
New funding models for creativity and innovation - ekip beyond 2026:

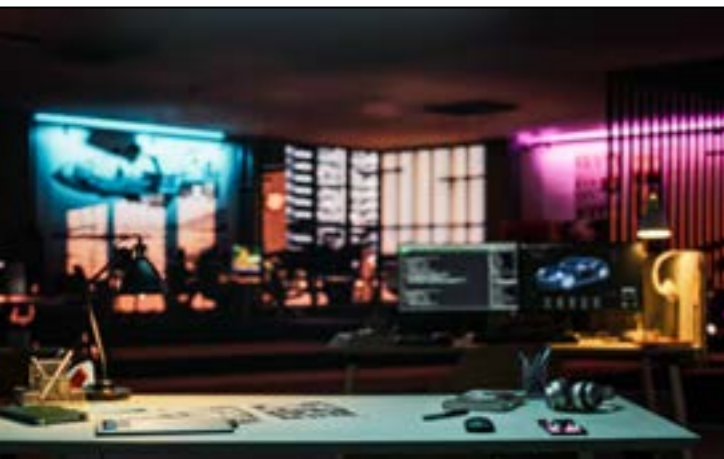
Emphasised the need for new funding models, calling for accessible infrastructures and long-term investment in intermediaries connecting creative, scientific, technological and public actors.

## Have you also noticed that Europe continues to fail to fully leverage one of its most powerful innovation drivers?

Creativity is widely acknowledged as valuable – but it is still rarely approached as a strategic component of Europe's innovation system.

Together with Lena Holmberg, Jeroen van der Aa, Christian Ehler, Michiel Scheffer, Alberto Mina and Michalis Stangos, the discussion moved decisively beyond framing Cultural and Creative Industries as a matter of cultural support.

Instead, the focus shifted to their role as innovation infrastructure – shaping competitiveness, enabling AI development, strengthening regional ecosystems, and driving societal transformation.



There was broad agreement in the room: creativity is not peripheral – it is foundational. The real challenge is not recognition, but integration.

If Europe understands the central role of creativity in innovation, why do our funding systems still fail to treat it as such?

Why is creativity not systematically embedded in innovation funding frameworks alongside technology, research, and industrial policy?

One of the strongest interventions came from Christian Ehler, Member of European Parliament, who pushed this point further.

He argued that the “appreciation discussion” is over. Politically, the case has been made. The gap is structural: Europe still lacks an overarching innovation agenda that fully integrates creativity as a cross-cutting capability – connecting it to competitiveness, AI, research, regional development, and societal transformation as a single, coherent system.

And perhaps even more importantly, he argued that politics alone cannot define that strategy for the sector.

“That’s your job,” he said bluntly when discussing the future of FP10 and innovation frameworks.

What made his keynote particularly compelling was that he did not frame creativity simply as an economic instrument.

Again and again, he returned to a deeper idea: societies cannot navigate major transformations through regulation, infrastructure, and technology alone.

“The most impactful innovations do not emerge solely from laboratories with the right equipment, but also from encounters with the right questions.”

At one point, he described how the creative sector historically helped societies contextualise transformation itself, whether during the Renaissance or other periods of major change. Politics, he argued, does not do this well on its own.

Creatives, artists, designers, and storytellers help societies make sense of change emotionally, culturally, and socially. And that becomes especially important now, as AI, climate transition and demographic change begin reshaping Europe simultaneously.

The discussion then moved into the structural problem underneath all this: Europe still finances projects much more easily than ecosystems.

Michalis Stangos, President L-Stone Capital and MSCOMM, articulated this tension sharply when he argued that Europe should stop treating creativity-driven innovation as cultural expenditure or social cohesion spending and begin treating it as strategic competitive investment with equal institutional backing and risk appetite as deep tech.

Because by 2035, he argued, the companies defining European competitiveness will not win through cheaper manufacturing or technical efficiency alone.

“They are going to win on how they design experience, how they embed trust and how they communicate meaning.”

That line captured something many people in the room seemed to recognise instinctively: Europe's competitive edge may increasingly depend on capabilities our financial systems still struggle to evaluate.

Innovation Districts may play a crucial role here! Alberto Mina, CEO of Milano Innovation District (MIND) where public-private collaborations and investments turn the former Expo Milano 2015 site into a thriving hub for research, innovation, and business, view social sciences and the humanities as a competitive advantage that will impact investments in the innovation district.

Michiel Scheffer, President of the European Innovation Council Board, that has a background in the Creative Industries, lifts the important role of the universities when it comes to investability in CCI-innovation. The EIC was created to back Europe's high-risk, high-potential innovations, with a strong focus on scalability and global competitiveness.

Here ekip's work on cross-innovation portfolios is one way to leverage the universities' impact on radical innovation in these multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Now is the time to bring these discussions into action. What role do you want to play in the transformation?



In the panel: Christian Ehler, Michiel Scheffer, Alberto Mina, Michalis Stangos



” What Europe lacks is an innovation agenda that fully integrates creativity as a capability. Without that integration, funding continues to follow outdated assumptions about where innovation originates and how value is created.

” The most impactful innovations do not emerge solely from laboratories with the right equipment, but also from encounters with the right questions.

Christian Ehler, Member of European Parliament

## Conclusions and next steps

**At the very end of the event**, former Deputy Director-General at the European Commission Jens Nyman was asked to reflect on the day. He underlined both the strength of the contributions made throughout the event and the significance of ekip as a powerful and evolving platform for change. Rather than attempting to summarise every intervention, he emphasised the broader direction that had emerged: Cultural and Creative Industries must not be treated as an add-on, but integrated from the outset into how the European Commission approaches open innovation and policy design.

In this context, the ekip Engine was presented as a shared language and practical framework that can support Commission services and responsible Directorates-General in shaping more accurate, collaborative and forward-looking policies.

Looking ahead, he highlighted education as a decisive factor, both in fostering experimentation, imagination and learning through failure in schools, and in strengthening the entrepreneurial capacities

of CCIs so that creative excellence can be matched with sustainable business development. He also stressed the importance of building stronger relationships with business, encouraging other companies to engage with CCIs and the Engine as part of a mutually beneficial innovation agenda. Taken together, these reflections pointed not only to the success of the day, but to a clear sense of momentum for the next phase of ekip.

Based on the discussions during the event, the ten recommendations included in the pre-event material was distilled into both a shorter five point list and a vision addressing the European Parliament and the European Council

This material will inform our upcoming work on providing more concrete examples of how parts of the recommendations have already been implemented at different levels, creating a stronger basis for future policy development.

It will also serve as a foundation for ekip's event in the Netherlands in October and for other related activities.

## Five recommendations for the EP and Council

1. Embed CCIs structurally across EU programmes, horizontally and vertically

Cultural and Creative Industries are not a niche add-on, but a strategic capability for Europe. Require their systematic integration across FP10 and relevant MFF in how programmes are designed, governed, and implemented. This means both horizontal integration across all innovation domains and vertical integration, as in Cluster 2, within key value chains, so CCIs can develop on their own terms while driving change in other sectors.

2. Break down policy silos and enhance cross-policy approach

Europe's cultural and innovation policies still run in parallel tracks. To change this, we need concrete bridges, both conceptual and structural. Concepts such as "innovation by (cultural) production" give CCIs a recognised and powerful role within innovation frameworks. Paired with joint priority-setting and combined funding structures at EU and Member State level, these tools make co-designed, cross-policy programmes possible and lasting.

3. Redesign innovation ecosystems around Open Innovation, built for how CCIs actually work

CCIs do not innovate in straight lines. They work through networks, experimentation, iteration, and collaboration: a creative swarm logic that traditional innovation systems were not built to support. Redesign the building blocks of European innovation ecosystems, including funding, infrastructure, skills, and regulation, around Open Innovation as a guiding principle, so CCIs have the capacity and the environment to contribute fully.

4. Shift to innovation portfolio-based financing and investment, with intermediaries as orchestrators

Move from fragmented project funding to coordinated, multi-stakeholder innovation portfolios that make transformative and radical innovation possible. This requires both the right structures, with strategic intermediaries who connect CCIs, academia, industry, and society, and the right instruments: dedicated financing mechanisms with appropriate risk appetite, blended finance models, and value metrics that treat creativity-led innovation as the strategic investment it is. Intermediaries and investors must both be recognised and resourced accordingly.

5. Build a standing foresight engine to keep CCI innovation policy ahead of the curve

Innovation policy that reacts is already behind. Europe needs a continuous, collaborative foresight capacity: structured policy journeys that bring together CCI communities, researchers, industry, and public actors to anticipate challenges, identify opportunities, and translate them into action. This is not a one-off process. It is a living, demand driven engine that keeps ecosystems adaptive, policy accurate, and Europe's creative advantage actively in play.



Charlotte Lorentz Hjorth, coordinator for ekip and Jens Nyman, former Deputy Director-General at the European Commission.

## The ekip Vision ten years into the future:

### A European Cultural and Creative Innovation Union

**Europe has undergone a profound transformation in how it understands and delivers innovation. Cultural and Creative Industries are no longer recognised merely for their contribution – they are structurally embedded as a strategic capability at the very core of Europe’s innovation system. This shift reflects a deeper realisation: innovation is not only technological, but cultural, social, and human in nature. When these dimensions are integrated, innovation becomes more meaningful, more widely adopted, and more resilient.**

At a moment when Europe risks losing ground in the global technology race, it still holds an extraordinary and distinctive advantage: creativity. The shift in value is already visible. There was a time when Europe’s engineers were the primary target of global competition. Now, designers, storytellers, makers, and creative thinkers are equally sought after, because the future will be shaped not only by who builds the technology, but by who gives it meaning, usability, desirability, and trust. Europe’s opportunity lies precisely here—not in treating creativity as secondary, but in recognising it as one of its most strategic assets.

#### Structural integration

The turning point came when Europe moved beyond recognition and made integration a requirement. Cultural and creative intelligence is now systematically woven into the fabric of European programmes. It shapes how programmes are designed, governed, and implemented. In this system, CCIs are not an add-on, not a silo, and not a niche domain consulted only at the edges. They operate as a horizontal force across all areas of innovation—from biotech and medtech to climate, mobility, advanced manufacturing, and the digital transition—while also acting as a vertical driver within key value chains. Creativity has become a thread running through the whole fabric of European innovation, enabling cross-sector transformation by design.

#### Shared governance

At the heart of this transformation lies a new governance paradigm. The historic divide between cultural policy and innovation policy has been overcome through shared governance structures and aligned funding systems. Cultural actors, scientists, entrepreneurs, educators, investors, and policymakers now work together within coordinated frameworks that enable joint priority-setting and co-designed programmes. Decision-making has become more inclusive, more connected, and more attuned to societal values.

This integration is reinforced through dual and complementary funding models that bridge economic and cultural objectives. Together, they support a more systemic approach to innovation—one that recognises value not only in terms of growth, but also in terms of meaning, trust, behavioural change, quality of life, and social cohesion. This has required a fundamental rethinking of how value itself is assessed. For too long, Europe’s evaluation systems have been calibrated to recognise only a narrow set of outcomes: patents, revenue, scale, and immediate market return. Yet many of the most important contributions of CCIs have remained invisible within these frameworks. Cultural relevance, civic participation, shifts in behaviour, inclusion, and lived experience have too often been treated as intangible or secondary effects, rather than as central dimensions of innovation impact.

That has now changed. Europe has begun to build a broader and more intelligent evaluation culture, one capable of recognising the full spectrum of value generated by creative and cross-sector innovation. This means measuring not only what can be easily counted, but also what genuinely changes how people live, engage, trust, and participate. It means understanding that innovation succeeds not only when it scales financially, but when it transforms systems, behaviours, and social realities in lasting ways.

Within this new system, “Innovation by production” has emerged as a powerful connector. Cultural production processes,



whether in design, media, performing arts, architecture, gaming, or immersive environments, have become sites where new knowledge is generated and translated into tangible innovation. They link creative practice with industrial and technological development, opening pathways that were previously disconnected. Through this, different logics—cultural, technological, economic, and social—are no longer seen as competing forces, but as complementary dimensions that generate new forms of value when brought together.

#### Open ecosystems

As governance and funding have evolved, so too has the structure of Europe’s innovation ecosystems. These have been fundamentally redesigned to support Open Innovation—an approach that reflects how CCIs actually operate: collaboratively, iteratively, and across networks. The building blocks of innovation—funding, infrastructure, regulation, and skills—no longer function as isolated pillars. Instead, they form an interconnected system of structures that reinforces seamless collaboration across sectors.

Within these ecosystems, innovation unfolds through distributed, networked constellations of actors that can rapidly assemble and reconfigure around emerging challenges. This swarm-like logic allows for speed, adaptability, and cross-sector exchange at a scale and depth that traditional systems struggled to

achieve. Intermediaries play a crucial role in this environment, connecting disciplines, translating between communities, and enabling trust. Innovation is no longer conceived as a linear pipeline. It is understood instead as a living, relational process—shaped through collaboration, experimentation, and shared intelligence.

#### Investment logic

This systemic shift is matched by a transformation in how Europe invests. Fragmented, project-based funding has given way to coordinated portfolios of initiatives that evolve over time. These portfolios bring together multiple stakeholders across sectors, linking research, industry, finance, cities, and CCIs within shared trajectories. They build strategic value chains in areas such as artificial intelligence for creativity, immersive media, ecodesign, regenerative materials, and inclusive digital services, where technological excellence and cultural depth reinforce one another.

In this new investment logic, Europe has embraced a more mature and courageous relationship with risk. It has recognised that truly transformative innovation cannot emerge if every proposal is expected to be safe, linear, and fully predictable from the outset. For too long, European finance has struggled to support uncertainty, and the creative sector itself has too often internalised

that conservatism—adjusting its ambitions downward, narrowing its proposals, and learning to speak in the language of caution rather than possibility. That culture is now being reversed. Europe increasingly understands that bold experimentation must be protected, that failure can be productive, and that projects that aimed high and did not fully succeed may still generate essential knowledge, new capacities, and future breakthroughs.

This is why Europe has moved decisively from funding isolated projects to funding ecosystems, portfolios, and trajectories. The 70–20–10 portfolio model has become a guiding principle for the deployment of capital at scale: sustaining proven approaches where stability matters, supporting relevant innovation where adaptation is needed, and reserving space for transformational bets where entirely new futures can emerge. This balance has allowed Europe to combine resilience and ambition, consolidation and exploration.

### Strategic instrument

At the centre of this evolution stands a new strategic instrument: a Creative Investment Framework. This framework is not a minor budget line hidden within larger programmes, nor a symbolic gesture towards culture. It is a purpose-built European mechanism designed to deploy capital at the creativity frontier, with its own logic, its own theory of value, and its own risk appetite. It exists because the most transformative forms of creative innovation have too often fallen between categories—considered too experimental for conventional finance, too cross-sectoral for traditional policy silos, and too socially embedded to be captured by narrow market metrics.

The Creative Investment Framework closes that gap. It gives Europe the capacity to back the ideas, ecosystems, and collaborations that existing systems are structurally unable to reach. It makes room for the 10 per cent of transformational bets that do not fit inherited criteria, but which may define Europe's future competitiveness and societal resilience. It recognises that the creativity frontier is not peripheral to the innovation economy—it is one of its most decisive engines.

### Adaptive Foresight

At the same time, governance has become more forward-looking and adaptive. CCIs are fully embedded across all European competitiveness instruments, including regulatory frameworks and experimental environments such as sandboxes. These spaces allow new ideas to be tested under real-world conditions, ensuring that innovation is not only technically robust but also culturally relevant and socially grounded. A strong foresight capacity now connects actors across Europe, identifying emerging trends, capturing weak signals, and translating them into actionable policies and investments. This evolving capability can be understood as a shared language of innovation—an engine that helps ensure the quality, relevance, and accuracy of contributions and results across programmes. It is a language that Commission services can adopt, adapt, and apply across Directorates-General, enabling a more coherent and effective approach to open innovation and policy design.

This also marks a broader cultural shift in how policies are conceived. Cultural and Creative Industries are not brought in at the end—they are engaged from the very beginning. Open Innovation and design principles now shape policy from the conceptual stage onward, embedding creativity, experimentation, and human-centred thinking throughout. In doing so, Europe ensures that innovation systems reflect how change actually happens: collaboratively, iteratively, and across disciplines.

### Learning Systems

Education plays a fundamental role in sustaining this transformation. Across Europe, learning systems are evolving to embrace experimentation and creativity as core competences. Young people are encouraged not only to master existing knowledge, but also to imagine new possibilities, take risks, and learn through failure. At the same time, cultural and creative professionals are increasingly equipped with the entrepreneurial, financial, and strategic capabilities needed to build sustainable ventures in a demanding and competitive world. Creativity alone is no longer expected to carry the burden of success; it is now supported by the skills and structures that allow it to flourish.



This transformation extends beyond the creative sector itself. Businesses across Europe increasingly recognise the value of working with CCIs, not as a symbolic gesture, but as a strategic advantage. Collaboration with creative actors enhances their capacity for innovation, deepens their connection to users and markets, and strengthens their ability to respond to complex challenges. What has emerged is a genuinely reciprocal relationship—a clear win-win—in which creativity and industry co-evolve within shared innovation ecosystems.

### European Model

The results are tangible. Europe's green transition is not only technologically advanced, but anchored in everyday practices and widely embraced. Digital systems are designed with trust, inclusion, and democratic values at their core. Innovation delivers not only growth, but cohesion and well-being, reflecting the diverse realities of European societies.

What has emerged is a distinct European model of innovation—one that is open, collaborative, and deeply rooted in cultural and societal intelligence. By fully integrating Cultural and Creative Industries across its systems, Europe has shifted from fragmentation to orchestration. Innovation is no longer driven by isolated actors or sectors, but by interconnected systems that align creativity, technology, investment, and society.

In this Europe, creativity is not an accessory to innovation. It is its foundation, its method, and its frontier—shaping a future in which innovation generates not only solutions, but also meaning, inclusion, resilience, and lasting impact.





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