

# RECHARGE

Resilient European Cultural Heritage  
As Resource for Growth & Engagement

**Policy recommendations**

## **Enhancing participatory approaches in Cultural Heritage Organisations for a more sustainable and inclusive sector**



**Funded by  
the European Union**



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For more information about RECHARGE, we invite you to access <https://recharge-culture.eu/>



# RECHARGE project

RECHARGE stands for Resilient European Cultural Heritage As Resource for Growth and Engagement. Keywords that together synthesise the aim of the project itself: to reinvigorate community participation as added economic value for cultural heritage organisations across Europe.

Funded within the European Union's (EU) HORIZON Europe programme (under agreement no. 101061233), the key funding programme for research and innovation within the EU, RECHARGE supports cultural heritage organisations in diversifying their funding through replicable and sustainable participatory business models, to acquire the necessary tools for its future developments, both in the digital realm and onsite. RECHARGE builds on new and existing communities, networks and relationships related to cultural heritage organisations, to engage them in participatory management through cultural heritage living labs. These labs, developed collaboratively and open to professionals and the public, aimed at testing and devising innovative ways to harness resources, to ensure the development of sustainable future business models, focused on the creation and integration of value within each organisation and in the sector at large.

## Project Partners





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# Abbreviations

- CCS: Cultural and Creative Sectors
- CCSI: Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries
- DG EAC: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
- EACEA: European Education and Culture Executive Agency
- EISMEA: European Innovation Council and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Executive Agency
- ENoLL: European Network of Living Labs
- EPRS: European Parliamentary Research Service
- EU: European Union
- ICOM: International Council of Museums
- IP: Intellectual Property
- OMC: Open Method of Coordination
- REA: European Research Executive Agency
- RECHARGE: Resilient European Cultural Heritage As Resource for Growth and Engagement



# Executive Summary

“Enhancing participatory approaches in cultural heritage organisations for a more sustainable and inclusive sector” presents a comprehensive policy framework aimed at strengthening the role of cultural heritage organisations across Europe – evolving from gatekeepers of cultural heritage into active facilitators of participation within the sector. Drawing from insights gathered through its nine living labs and extensive collaborative research, the RECHARGE policy recommendations address the urgent need for a more human-centred approach to participation, fostering trust-building and long-term partnerships.

The policy recommendations underscore the importance of implementing and testing participatory business models that encourage shared resources and support a more inclusive and democratic governance structure in cultural heritage organisations. Participation is framed not simply as audience development, but as iterative participatory practices and shared responsibility that invites diverse stakeholders to co-create, co-decide, and co-own cultural heritage. In line with international frameworks such as the Faro Convention and the International Council of Museums’ (ICOM) new definition of museums, these recommendations advocate for long-term structural support for embedding participation into the organisational framework of cultural heritage organisations.

**The nine RECHARGE policy recommendations are summarised below:**

1. Recognise relationship-building and community participation as core to heritage work, and support them accordingly.
2. Enhance the capacity and sustainability of volunteer infrastructure through targeted policy support as a key complement to participatory cultural heritage initiatives, serving the public good, and deserving skills investment.

3. Provide robust support for capacity-building programmes that equip cultural heritage organisations to effectively implement participatory approaches.
4. Enable institutional change by establishing sustainable funding streams dedicated to participatory cultural heritage initiatives.
5. Promote innovative and participatory financing and legal models for cultural heritage through research and training.
6. Establish an EU-wide Cultural living labs recognition scheme to boost the visibility of participatory co-creation practices and encourage their uptake across the cultural heritage sector.
7. Develop an EU evaluation framework for participatory heritage, enabling research on its effectiveness and efficiency.
8. Include participant motivation as a key metric in assessing cultural heritage participation.
9. Support the establishment of a data/resources collection framework on Cultural Participation to systematically monitor engagement in cultural heritage, inform policymaking, and foster knowledge exchange and capacity-building across the sector.

Together, these recommendations provide a roadmap for strengthening the cultural heritage sector through inclusive, participatory practices. By embedding participation into policy, funding schemes, and institutional frameworks, cultural heritage organisations across Europe can become more resilient, responsive, and relevant to the communities they serve. The RECHARGE project demonstrates that participation is not an optional add-on, but a vital driver of innovation, sustainability, and public value in heritage work. It is time for European and national policies to reflect that reality.





# Introduction

The RECHARGE project employed a multi-method approach to develop and test a framework for participatory business models in cultural heritage organisations. This included a literature review to identify key components, data analysis to assess existing practices, and the application of a process-oriented living labs definition to explore its relevance in cultural contexts. The framework was tested in nine living labs and refined through consultations with cultural heritage organisations and policymakers to align with their operational, strategic, and financial needs.

These policy recommendations build on that foundation, guiding readers from the broader European policy context and organisational challenges facing cultural heritage organisations to specific, actionable recommendations. It introduces the RECHARGE project's core concepts – particularly the participatory business models and living labs methodology – and presents key findings from research and real-life testing. Each recommendation is supported by explanatory notes that clarify its rationale and outline its potential impact on policy and practice in the cultural heritage sector.

## Who are the RECHARGE policy recommendations aimed at?

The RECHARGE policy recommendations are directed at key stakeholders within and outside the cultural heritage and creative sectors, who can address the recommendations and help shape the future of the sector. In particular:

**Policy- and decision-makers at the European and national levels**

Actors who shape cultural policy frameworks, including allocating funding and setting strategic priorities for the cultural heritage sector.

**Cultural heritage networks**

Institutions, organisations, alliances, and hubs that connect professionals and institutions across the sector to share knowledge, advocate for common interests, and support collaboration (e.g., Europeana Foundation, Heritage Research Hub, NEMO).

**Cultural heritage organisations and cultural and creative sector**

Museums, archives, libraries, other cultural organisations, as well as music, performing arts, craft, film industry, and more.

To ensure impact, relevance, and alignment across different governance and policy actors, these recommendations should be considered, coordinated, and, when appropriate, implemented at the local, national, and/or European level.



# Policy Context and RECHARGE Contributions

## Policy Context

In recent decades, the cultural heritage sector has faced growing calls – especially from the EU institutions and cultural networks – to become more participatory and to transition from a primary focus on increasing audience numbers to embracing collaborative practices and bottom-up perspectives.<sup>1</sup> These calls also urge cultural heritage organisations to stay relevant by becoming welcoming spaces where citizens can engage as active participants, contributing to the preservation and sharing of cultural heritage knowledge and values with future generations.<sup>2</sup>

A key milestone in this shift was the Faro Convention (CoE 2005). It formalised the idea that heritage belongs to communities, and that these communities should therefore be actively involved in decision-making processes and take on co-responsibility for cultural heritage.<sup>3</sup>

Building on this idea, the Council Conclusions on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage (EC 2014) emphasised that active participation by people and communities across Europe strengthens democracy and social bonds.<sup>4</sup> Cultural heritage is recognised as a common good and as a shared resource. It supports sustainable, inclusive growth and requires multi-level, multi-stakeholder governance, with involvement from local to European levels, and ensuring transparency and cooperation among all stakeholders.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the European Union. (2014). Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage (2014/C 463/01). Official Journal of the European Union.

<sup>2</sup> See the European Commission. (2019). European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: 10.2766/949707.

<sup>3</sup> See Article 12 of the Council of Europe. (2005). Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199). Faro, Portugal: Council of Europe.

<sup>4</sup> See point 8 of the European Union. (2014). Council conclusions.

<sup>5</sup> See points 13-14 of the Conclusions. Ibid; and Council of the European Union. (2017). Decision (EU) 2017/864 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on a European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018). Official Journal of the European Union, L 131/1–9



The relevance of culture, and more specifically cultural heritage, to European citizens is demonstrated through people's engagement with public cultural celebrations, e.g., the European Heritage Day (over 20 million people across 50 countries).<sup>6</sup> According to the European Commission, culture, including cultural heritage, also plays a significant role in economic growth and social cohesion. This includes job creation, support for local businesses, and increased revenue from visits, events, and heritage programmes. In response, both the European Union (EU) and its Member States have worked to broaden and strengthen cultural policy, aiming to create a more cohesive, participatory, and integrated cultural heritage sector.<sup>7</sup> The European Institutions, for example, emphasises multi-level policy collaboration through instruments like the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the 2015 Council Work Plan for Culture, which prioritises cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>

Amid the gradual increase in the importance of audience engagement with cultural heritage – starting with the Faro Convention's emphasis on the value of heritage for society, specifying the need for social inclusion and audience participation, the launch of the Creative Europe Programme (2014), and the European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018) helped build momentum for funding and policies to support more effective heritage management. In this context, the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration gained relevance, urging stakeholders from public authorities, the cultural heritage sector, private actors, and civil society organisations to work together, enhancing the full potential of cultural heritage for European societies and economies.<sup>9</sup>

## RECHARGE Contribution

The RECHARGE project work is inspired by the idea that involving communities in preservation, collaborative governance, and interpretation of cultural heritage improves social inclusion, democracy, and local identity.<sup>10</sup> Based on these ideas and in alignment with the ICOM museum definition

<sup>6</sup> European Commission. (2014). Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe. COM(2014) 477 final. Brussels: European Commission, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 4-6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Council of the European Union, 2017, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> See Article 2 of the Council of Europe. (2005). Faro Convention; the European Commission (2018). Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage. Handbook. Brussels: European Union, p. 42-47; and the European Commission. (2019). European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: 10.2766/949707, p. 16.



from 2022,<sup>11</sup> RECHARGE emphasises the need to embed participatory practices into the very structure of cultural heritage organisations and sustain these practices over time.

Participatory practices in cultural heritage organisations involve engaging a broad range of stakeholders, both internal and external, in co-creation, co-curation, and shared ownership of activities and outcomes. RECHARGE proposes an innovative approach that integrates participatory business models with the living labs methodology, specifically adapted to the context of cultural heritage organisations.<sup>12</sup> This approach focuses on practical, stakeholder-led engagement and supports initiatives that not only involve participants but also strengthen the organisation itself – for example, by building long-term partnerships and developing flexible, collaborative programmes.<sup>13</sup> Participatory business models help organisations understand the purpose and value of participation, while the living labs framework creates space for experimentation, learning, and adaptation.<sup>14</sup>

As a way to put the theoretical framework around participatory business models and living labs to the test, the RECHARGE project merged the two approaches and implemented three RECHARGE living labs using a four-phase structure: (i) preparation, (ii) co-design, (iii) implementation, and (iv) reflection. The process proved to be highly participatory and iterative, with each phase tested, evaluated, and refined based on insights gained along the way. The project then extended this methodology to six external cultural heritage organisations, which developed a Living Lab under the project's mentorship. The outcomes demonstrated a positive impact, contributing to increased community engagement, innovative cultural experiences and strengthened partnerships. These results also play a key role in shaping the final formulation of the RECHARGE Models, which will be explained in the next section.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> ICOM, Museum Definition, August 2024:

<https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

<sup>12</sup> The following section will explain a few key concepts used throughout the project, including RECHARGE Models and living labs methodology, for more details see Participatory Business Models and RECHARGE deliverable 1.1: Typology of Sustainable Financing and Participatory Practices in the Cultural Heritage Sector, September 2023, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> See RECHARGE D1.1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> For more details on the design, implementation and results of the RECHARGE living labs, see RECHARGE deliverable 2.2: CH living labs, July 2025.



# Main Insights from the RECHARGE Research

## Foundational Concepts and their Interconnections

This section introduces three important concepts used in this document, followed by four of the most important findings of the RECHARGE project.<sup>16</sup>

The project aimed to explore what participatory practices are and how cultural heritage organisations can benefit from integrating them into their daily operations and organisational structures. It also examined how the living labs methodology can support cultural heritage organisations in implementing these practices and maintaining them over time. Another key focus was to analyse how participatory business models operate in real-world cultural heritage organisation settings, helping organisations identify new paths to financial sustainability while staying aligned with their core values.

## Participatory Practices

In this context, participatory approaches are understood as collaborative, stakeholder-engaged processes that aim to co-create sustainable solutions to address challenges cultural heritage organisations face, ensuring inclusivity, shared benefits, and ongoing learning.<sup>17</sup> These approaches promote shared responsibility, collaborative governance, and creative co-production, enabling stakeholders to contribute ideas, participate in policy setting, and influence cultural programming and management practices.<sup>18</sup>

Specifically, participatory approaches encompass a range of engagement levels, from providing ideas and perspectives to full involvement in governance and decision-making structures. These engagement levels are aimed at aligning cultural heritage organisations' activities with community

<sup>16</sup> For more details on the RECHARGE key concepts and other research outputs, please visit: <https://recharge-culture.eu/>.

<sup>17</sup> RECHARGE D1.1, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> RECHARGE deliverable 3.2: Report on Effectiveness of Cultural Business Models, March 2025, p. 34.



needs and enhancing social and cultural impact.<sup>19</sup> They are iterative, experimental methodologies that facilitate stakeholder engagement through early involvement, mutual benefit definition, transparent communication, co-evaluation, and capacity-building. Examples of participatory approaches include:<sup>20</sup>

- Co-designing exhibitions, programming, or conservation strategies;
- Engaging the public in data collection, interpretation, or storytelling related to cultural heritage;
- Collaborating with local communities to identify needs and priorities and leading initiatives and activities;
- Establishing joint decision-making bodies where community members, managers, and policymakers work together to develop policies or management plans;
- Facilitating open conversations with diverse stakeholders to discuss needs, expectations, and impacts, fostering mutual understanding.

## Living Labs

Living labs are innovative, participatory ecosystems that leverage collaboration, user involvement, and real-life testing environments to co-create solutions addressing societal, urban, and cultural challenges. They are flexible and adaptable frameworks that support experimentation, learning, and transformation across diverse contexts and support collaboration between different industries, research, cultural heritage organisations, and citizens.<sup>21</sup>

Living labs are characterised by six features that RECHARGE considers indispensable parts of participatory processes. These facilitate co-creation, experimentation, and iterative learning processes:<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See RECHARGE D1.1, p. 38-41.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

1. Multi-stakeholder participation involves engaging a variety of stakeholders, including citizens, public authorities, the private sector, researchers, and other relevant actors.
2. Public-private partnerships facilitating collaboration between public authorities and private sector organisations.
3. Collaborative governance and management, ensuring active engagement and shared responsibility among diverse actors.
4. Structured setup, providing an organised framework that supports the implementation of activities and coherent processes throughout all the stages.
5. Real-life contexts for experimentation, enabling stakeholders to interact with technologies and services in practical situations.
6. User-centred practices, prioritising the needs, behaviours, and experiences of users.

Characterised as arenas for cross-sectoral collaboration, living labs support innovation in urban contexts, addressing societal needs such as environmental awareness, responsible consumption, and equitable governance and facilitating policy change and societal transformation through experimental projects.<sup>23</sup>

## Participatory Business Models

Participatory business models are innovative frameworks that engage multiple stakeholders (including communities, users, partners, and organisations) in the creation, delivery, and capture of value. Unlike traditional business models that are centred on transactional exchanges and profit maximisation, participatory models prioritise collaboration, co-creation, and the generation of social and cultural value. The RECHARGE project has adapted these principles to the context of cultural heritage organisations,

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 39-40.





The outcome is a set of three RECHARGE models that emphasise inclusion and democratic participation, positioning cultural heritage organisations as platforms or facilitators of shared ownership, resource pooling, and community engagement. This approach supports the development of more sustainable, impactful, and contextually relevant initiatives.<sup>24</sup>

### Participatory Resource Pooling Model

The first model is a collaborative approach enabling cultural heritage organisations to transcend limitations of isolated operation by strategically sharing and pooling resources, infrastructure, knowledge, and audiences. This model enhances organisational capacity, broadens outreach, enriches cultural offerings, and improves financial sustainability through long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships. Cultural heritage organisations act both as contributors to and beneficiaries of shared resource networks. However, there are some barriers that need to be overcome for the model to be implemented, these barriers include:<sup>25</sup>

- Institutional resistance and fear of losing control over assets.
- Legal and governance complexities (e.g., IP rights, management agreements).
- Coordination and trust-building challenges among diverse stakeholders (competition vs cooperation models).
- Misalignment of objectives between cultural heritage organisations and commercial or academic partners.
- Technical interoperability issues when pooling digital resources.

<sup>24</sup> See RECHARGE project. (2025). Playbook on Participatory Cultural Business Models. Version 2.0, July 2025, p. 7, available at: <https://recharge-culture.eu/processes/knowledge-base>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

## Participatory Platform Model

The second proposed model transforms cultural heritage organisations from direct service providers into facilitators of collaborative platforms. In this model, cultural heritage organisations establish shared digital or physical ecosystems that connect diverse stakeholder groups – such as artists, local businesses, educational institutions, and users, enabling them to interact, exchange, and co-create value. The cultural heritage organisation's role involves curating, moderating, and managing these platforms to ensure trust, quality, and engagement. Once again, there are some barriers that need to be overcome for the model to be implemented, these barriers include:<sup>26</sup>

- Technical and digital capacity requirements to build and manage platforms.
- Governance and curation complexities, balancing stakeholder interests.
- Ensuring quality control and upkeep of ethical considerations.
- Trust-building challenges among diverse stakeholders.
- Risk of mission drift if commercial priorities overshadow cultural or educational goals.
- Revenue-sharing conflicts between stakeholders, including legal and tax issues.

## Participatory Ownership Model

The third and final model emphasises collaborative ownership and co-governance among cultural heritage organisations and various stakeholders, such as private companies, other cultural organisations, service providers, etc. It promotes shared responsibilities, resources, risks, and revenues, and supports innovative business structures such as revenue sharing, joint ventu-

<sup>26</sup> See RECHARGE Playbook, p. 10.

res, cooperatives, and co-opetition, enabling cultural heritage organisations and partners to jointly own and co-develop cultural initiatives. Typically, cultural heritage organisations maintain control over their assets but adopt a more collective management approach to enhance innovation, market relevance, and financial resilience through private sector partnerships, community co-ownership schemes, and cross-sector collaborations. As with the two previous models, there are some barriers<sup>27</sup> that need to be overcome for the model to be implemented; these barriers are:

- Legal and regulatory challenges around shared ownership and intellectual property.
- Cultural reluctance within cultural heritage organisations to share authority and control.
- Risk assessment and mitigation strategies in case of failures.
- Governance complexities in multi-sided ownership arrangements.
- Potential power imbalances and conflicts among partners.
- Need for strong negotiation skills, contracts, and trust-building mechanisms.

## Main Findings Informing Policy Recommendations

Based on the analytical conceptualisation previously discussed and real-life experiments, the RECHARGE project generated valuable insights into participation that directly inform and support policymaking in the cultural heritage sector. Four key insights are the following:

<sup>27</sup> See RECHARGE Playbook, p. 11.

**Cultural heritage organisations and external stakeholders do not necessarily share similar values and priorities regarding participation.**

The project identified that many stakeholders, such as local communities, civil society, and private actors, value flexible, socially, and technologically driven initiatives. However, museums' efforts often prioritise organisational activities, allocating resources only to occasional public consultation and regular governance activities – e.g. leadership, strategic planning activities, and decision-making processes.<sup>28</sup> In this context, there is still a need for investment in open, participatory, and multi-level co-governance, as advocated by the OMC report.<sup>29</sup>

**The living labs methodology has proven efficient in the process of creating the necessary bridge between the interests of organisations and the public they serve.**

By offering space for co-creation and collaborative work, the nine RECHARGE living labs allowed experimentation and iteration of the RECHARGE Participatory Business Model Canvas, offering organisations new possibilities for revenue models and the adoption of stakeholder perspectives and demands.

**Participatory business models support the improvement of cultural heritage organisations' sustainability, resilience, and relevance by engaging communities, diversifying funding and revenue streams, and creating societal, environmental, and financial value.**

Cultural heritage organisations from different social and economic contexts in Europe tested and contributed to the refinement of existing participatory business model frameworks. The result of this process is reflected in the three RECHARGE models, which range from a more restricted form of participation to a more advanced one.

<sup>28</sup> RECHARGE D3.2, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission (2018). Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage. Handbook. Brussels: European Union, p. 22-24.



**Cultural heritage organisations might face structural and operational barriers to implementing participatory business models.**

Many cultural heritage organisations operate within entrenched institutional cultures that can offer resistance to decentralising authority or sharing control over heritage assets and decision-making. In addition, where organisations often struggle to balance the interests of multiple stakeholders, it can be particularly problematic when partnerships drift towards commercial priorities, undermining the organisations' cultural missions. Organisations also struggle to dedicate resources to trust-building across diverse stakeholder groups because it requires specific skills and is a time-consuming but essential process of relationship-building.

The RECHARGE project offers key insights that inform policy for a more participatory and resilient cultural heritage sector.

First, it revealed a persistent misalignment between the values of cultural heritage organisations and those of their stakeholders, who often favour flexible, socially responsive approaches. Second, the living labs methodology proved effective in bridging this gap, enabling co-creation and experimentation with the RECHARGE Participatory Business Model Canvas. Third, participatory business models contribute to cultural heritage organisations' sustainability by fostering community engagement, diversifying income, and generating social, environmental, and financial value. A final critical insight is that, while the RECHARGE project demonstrates the potential of participatory business models to strengthen the sustainability of cultural heritage organisations, these organisations might need to overcome barriers such as a lack of expertise to implement them.

These findings converge to inform the RECHARGE policy recommendations outlined in the next Chapter.



# Policy Recommendations

Enhancing participatory  
approaches in Cultural Heritage  
Organisations for a more  
sustainable and inclusive sector

The RECHARGE policy recommendations highlight the need for more inclusive, people-centred cultural policies that actively foster participation and sustainable partnerships.



## 1. Recognise relationship-building and community participation as core to heritage work, and support them accordingly.

RECHARGE's research underscores the vital role of relationship-building as a core organisational capacity – essential for fostering and sustaining connections among diverse stakeholders in the cultural heritage sector. Lasting participation in co-creation, co-curation, and shared decision-making relies on trust<sup>30</sup>, clear communication, and long-term engagement with volunteers, staff, suppliers, service providers, audiences, and others.<sup>31</sup> While EU initiatives like the New European Bauhaus and Horizon Europe programme support collaboration in the sector, gaps remain in fully recognising the value of participation in daily practice. More must be done to actively encourage it, develop relevant skills, and lower barriers to inclusive, cross-sectoral engagement. This calls for stable, dedicated support from cultural heritage networks, organisations, and policymakers at both European and national levels.

We recommend that the European Commission, through its instruments, like the Creative Europe Programme<sup>32</sup>, formally acknowledge relationship-building (between cultural heritage organisations, communities, creatives, and other stakeholders) as a professional and strategic function of cultural heritage organisations, on par with preservation, education, and exhibition. European policymakers should encourage trust-based engagement between cultural heritage organisations and diverse stakeholders, also by allowing preparatory phases in funding schemes and relaxing the pressure to deliver

<sup>30</sup> See UNDP 2016, as cited in UNV, State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2021, p. 21: "Trust as the cornerstone of the social contract connecting various stakeholders."

<sup>31</sup> See RECHARGE D1.2. Cultural heritage organisations usually work with a wide range of suppliers and service providers, from conservation and restoration materials, exhibition designers, digitisation services, IT and software providers, to researchers and external consultants and more. Often, the relationship with these service and material providers is purely commercial. The RECHARGE project proposes expanding this relationship beyond simple transactions, fostering long-term partnerships that bring mutual benefits to cultural heritage organisations and other stakeholders.

<sup>32</sup> In reference to the current Creative Europe Programme based on 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (hereafter MFF) as well as to the New Creative Europe Programme (name to be confirmed) based on the 2028-2034 MFF, in which the emphasis is placed on 'enhancing democratic resilience and participation (see Euractiv, European Commission. Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the Programme .... for the Funding Period .... Draft, 2025).

results based mostly on quantitative impact<sup>33</sup> and without considering the qualitative impact of participatory activities promoted by cultural heritage organisations.

**Adding participation on the EU policy agenda and encouraging Member States to create and promote national policy frameworks with a focus on:**

- Embedding relationship-building and stakeholder care in European and national cultural principles guidelines, strategic priorities plans, and (national) museum standards.
- Encouraging national heritage laws and funding schemes to define engagement as a formal institutional competency.

**Reshaping funding programmes, such as the New Creative Europe Programme (name to be confirmed)<sup>34</sup>, to:**

- Prioritise project funding to budget for participation-related roles (e.g., community mediator, artistic co-lead) in project grants, thus allowing people responsible for relationship-building work and support for participatory processes to receive fair payment and recognition.
- Enable funding for early-stage collaboration and trust-building with communities before project implementation (e.g., by involving community members in the preparation of project proposals).
- Promote flexible grant timelines and milestone structures, ensuring that participatory activities and trust-building between cultural heritage organisations and diverse stakeholders have sufficient time to develop and become stronger over time.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 32.

<sup>33</sup> The Creative Europe Programme has emphasised qualitative impact for awarded projects, e.g. the Call for Proposals "CREA-CULT-2025-COOP-UA – Support to Ukrainian Cultural and Creative Sectors, 2024."



**2. Enhance the capacity and sustainability of volunteer infrastructure through targeted policy support as a key complement to participatory cultural heritage initiatives, serving the public good, and deserving skills investment.**

Volunteering work has been systematically seen as a peripheral activity, often used only as a substitute or cost-cutting measure.<sup>35</sup> There is therefore an urgent need to shift how volunteering is recognised, implemented and supported in the cultural heritage sector<sup>36</sup> – from being primarily an individual, motivation-driven activity, to a more community-centred practice that fosters long-term engagement and sustainable practices. This new perspective calls for structural support and recognition of volunteering as a broader process with different layers that impact not just the individual's capacity to volunteer (micro level), or the organisational environment (meso level), but also the broader societal context (macro level) in which volunteering is made possible.<sup>37</sup> This multi-level perspective calls for cultural and social policy approaches that move beyond individual incentives or institutional support alone, and instead foster and enable ecosystems at all three levels:

- Micro level: cultural policies should support individuals' ability to volunteer by investing in skills development, flexible time-use policies, and recognition mechanisms, as well as supporting volunteer work capacity through training, accreditation, and accessible engagement opportunities.
- Meso level: cultural policies should incentivise and provide funding to organisations to create more inclusive, diverse, and attractive volunteering opportunities and invest in volunteer management.
- Macro level: cultural policies should recognise and incentivise volunteer work as a key contributor to public value, reinforcing solidarity, cohesion, and democratic life.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See RECHARGE deliverable 3.1: Report on Resilience in the CHIs - Cultural Volunteering as Catalyst for Participatory Practices, March 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 38. In practical terms, highlighting volunteering value in organisational policy documents, recognising individual contributions, rewarding long-term service, including volunteer contributions to annual budgeting reporting are implementable strategies that would support a positive change in perception on the volunteering work.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 28-30.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 28-30.

**Invest in individual skills development for cultural heritage volunteering by:**

- Funding subsidised skills development courses and workshops on cultural heritage with a focus on basic preservation, heritage presentation (e.g. exhibitions, guided tours) and cultural heritage management.
- Support partnership between cultural heritage organisations and schools, libraries and civil organisations to raise awareness about cultural volunteerism.

**Support Lifelong Learning policies and create or adapt existing and new funding programmes with a focus on:**

- Including development programmes aimed at enhancing volunteers' skills and capabilities in EU and national cultural funding schemes, to support the growth of cultural volunteers through upskilling programmes and resources emphasising digital, intercultural, and curatorial skill development.
- Providing operational support for volunteer coordinators and inclusive recruitment strategies through volunteer networks.
- Encouraging organisations to adopt flexible scheduling, allowing diverse groups (e.g., youth, seniors, caregivers) to participate as volunteers.
- Developing European quality standards and toolkits for volunteer engagement in cultural heritage organisations.



**Adapt the language in funding programmes and official documents, launch awareness campaigns, and support targeted funding. These efforts should focus on:**

- Integrating volunteering as a pillar of civic and cultural participation in EU and national policy texts.
- Promoting media campaigns and education initiatives that emphasise cultural volunteering and enable knowledge and experience sharing.

### **3. Provide robust support for capacity-building programmes that equip cultural heritage organisations to effectively implement participatory approaches.**

To embed participation more deeply into the cultural heritage sector, professional development and educational programmes need to be offered to cultural heritage organisations' professionals and their collaborators. European and national cultural heritage networks should help to strengthen institutional capacity by offering and promoting training that equips cultural heritage organisations to design and implement participatory models, including the living labs methodology.

We recommend that European and national cultural heritage networks, together with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), support the integration of participatory principles (such as stakeholder engagement, co-creation and co-design, shared value and resources, mutual benefit, and adaptable approaches) into vocational education and training programmes. We encourage EU-funded training initiatives and university curricula for professionals working in or with cultural heritage organisations to embed these principles into their learning models. In addition, we invite European and national heritage networks to promote the development and dissemination of tools and knowledge that enable the design of tailored participation models, aligned with the specific motivations of diverse user groups (e.g. families, elders, students, neighbourhood communities, artists, researchers).

#### **Adapting existing European and national funding programmes, supporting capacity building opportunities with a focus on:**

- Investing in the development of toolkits and upskilling materials that help European organisations learn how to use and implement participatory practices and business models, including how to address legal aspects.
- Offering capacity-building and peer-learning programmes on participatory approaches for cultural heritage organisations.
- Offering European and national grants to cultural heritage organisations for training and knowledge exchange on the living labs approach.

#### 4. Enable institutional change by establishing sustainable funding streams dedicated to participatory cultural heritage initiatives.

In the cultural heritage sector, long-term collaborations, such as those with volunteers, donors, and peer organisations, are often central to operational continuity, reflecting relationships that are sustained over time and integral to operational continuity. In contrast, collaborations with artists, local communities, and the private sector often occur at the project level and are typically tied to short-term initiatives.<sup>39</sup> To foster meaningful participation and ensure sustainable financing, these short-term partnerships should be allowed to evolve. Working with artists and other key stakeholders should not remain confined to temporary projects but should be embedded in long-term strategies and institutional frameworks. Therefore, cultural policies should support organisational transformation that prioritises long-term, trust-based relationships with diverse stakeholders, including artists and local communities.

We recommend that managing authorities of European and national funding programmes create dedicated funding lines to support cultural heritage organisations in adopting strategies and workflows based on participatory business models and living labs methodology. We also encourage the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), together with national cultural agencies, to encourage cultural heritage organisations to strengthen and expand cross-sectoral collaborations aimed at co-developing services with civil society, education, health, and innovation sectors to extend reach and relevance.

<sup>39</sup> See RECHARGE D1.2.



**Reviewing European and national funding programmes and incorporating changes, creating opportunities for:**

- Supporting pilot initiatives that test new internal governance, community ownership models, or co-creation protocols with funding streams for replication and continuity.
- Funding cross-sectoral consortia that include cultural heritage organisations, local governments, and community groups.
- Requiring cultural heritage organisations receiving EU or other public funds to define how they include underrepresented groups, non-goers, and creatives in their activities.
- Including a “participatory engagement legacy” section in grant applications and rewarding projects with plans for scaling or continuing partnerships beyond the funding period.

## 5. Promote innovative and participatory financing and legal models for cultural heritage through research and training.

Cultural heritage organisations face significant knowledge gaps in developing long-term, participatory financing strategies. Many lack clarity on which financial models are best suited to their size, structure, and mission, and are often unaware of the full range of financing options available.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, while participation is increasingly seen as a pathway to both greater public engagement and financial resilience, the value it generates, both socially and economically, is still undervalued and rarely integrated into financial planning.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, navigating legal frameworks (e.g. IP rights, legal constraints to shared ownership of cultural assets) that underpin participatory and collaborative financing strategies remains a challenge. Organisations often lack internal legal expertise, which limits their ability to act as platforms or facilitators of shared ownership, resource pooling, and co-governance models. Ensuring legal support to cultural heritage organisations is essential for scaling up such models in a transparent and sustainable way.

To address these challenges, cultural policies should support targeted research and practice-based learning on innovative financial strategies that align sustainability with participation. This includes building evidence on the effectiveness of participatory approaches in generating funding, promoting tailored solutions that reflect institutional diversity, and supporting impact evaluation frameworks. It also involves strengthening legal capacity within the sector through the development of training, guidance, and access to expertise and by sharing knowledge, resources, and training opportunities through new and existing initiatives, such as the Heritage Research Hub.

We invite the European Innovation Council and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Executive Agency (EISMEA), the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), and European policymakers to support cultural heritage networks and innovation research centres in advancing research on models and tools that connect participatory approaches and sustainable financing for cultural heritage organisations. We also recommend promoting and incentivising the use and implementation of models and tools that assist

<sup>40</sup> See RECHARGE D3.2.

<sup>41</sup> See RECHARGE D1.2.



cultural heritage organisations in sustainable financing and navigating legal frameworks, such as the RECHARGE Models and Playbook.<sup>42</sup>

**Fund the development of research and methods designed to assist cultural heritage organisations in:**

- Collecting, analysing, and disseminating examples of collaborative financial and legal practices in cultural heritage organisations.
- Offering toolkits on stakeholder budgeting, cooperative financing, legal framework for co-governance, and participatory financial evaluation.

And in connection to the above-mentioned task, support access to legal expertise and capacity-building training for cultural heritage organisations to navigate contracts, partnerships, intellectual property, privacy rights, and co-ownership models.

This policy recommendation is closely connected to recommendation #9, described below. We recommend that recommendation #5 be implemented in tandem with recommendation #9, thereby ensuring their complementary nature.

<sup>42</sup> See RECHARGE Playbook, 2025.



**6. Establish an EU-wide Cultural living labs recognition scheme to boost the visibility of participatory co-creation practices and encourage their uptake across the cultural heritage sector.**

Living labs are dynamic spaces where ideas and solutions can be co-created, tested, and iterated by collaborating stakeholders. The implementation of this methodology proved to be rewarding for the nine living labs carried out during the RECHARGE project, demonstrating positive impacts – ranging from strengthening networks and collaborative processes, through the benefit of introducing innovative tools and enhancing visitor engagement, to deepening local identity and heritage pride, creating new opportunities for local artists and increasing access to culture and heritage.<sup>43</sup> Living labs (as participatory innovation models) can strengthen the organisational performance, improving cultural heritage organisations' resilience and adaptability. For this reason, cultural heritage organisations need support for better understanding and further implementing participatory practices in an effective and sustainable way.

We embolden cultural heritage organisations to experiment and embrace the living labs methodology, such as early stakeholder engagement, co-creation and co-design sessions, and iterative and reflective processes. We call on the EC to prioritise supporting transnational networks in the cultural heritage sector and Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI), including European and national living labs networks, such as the ENoLL, in scaling up participatory practices and advancing the dissemination of the living labs methodology. These strategies can be achieved through investment in centralised professional development programmes for cultural heritage professionals with a focus on living lab design, facilitation, evaluation, and ethics. We recommend the development of an EU-wide label or certification system, established through collaboration between the European Parliament and Member States. This European Label would formally recognise cultural heritage organisations that effectively implement and sustain living lab methodologies, providing visibility, credibility, and incentives for participatory innovation across the sector.

<sup>43</sup> The RECHARGE project adopted and tested participatory models in nine living labs, three led by project partners and six by external cultural heritage organisations funded by the project. More details on the impact and lessons learnt from these nine living labs can be found in RECHARGE D2.3 and D3.2, as well as in the resources available on the project platform: <https://recharge-culture.eu/>.



- Creating awareness campaigns and promoting capacity-building activities with a focus on living lab training modules, with emphasis on co-creation, stakeholder care, and social innovation.
- Establishing a peer-reviewed certification process on European and national levels to assess living lab maturity and effectiveness in cultural heritage organisations. Existing living labs networks should work hand in hand with European entities on the scope and objectives of the certification, as well as on its criteria and framework. Further evaluation and assessment processes should be established to ensure clear and comprehensive standardisation.

## 7. Develop an EU evaluation framework for participatory heritage, enabling research on effectiveness and efficiency.

There is a lack of studies that assess the effectiveness and efficiency of cultural heritage organisations. While cultural organisations are increasingly expected to deliver social value, promote participation, and ensure sustainability, there is insufficient empirical evidence to assess how effective and efficient they are in achieving these goals.<sup>44</sup> This absence of robust evaluation frameworks limits the ability of policymakers and organisations to make informed decisions, allocate resources strategically, and improve operational models. Cultural policy frameworks should encourage cultural heritage organisations to adopt evidence-based planning and reporting mechanisms, aligned with participatory approaches and sustainable goals. Effectiveness and efficiency assessments for cultural heritage organisations need to be integrated into public funding criteria, making evaluation a core component of institutional accountability and improvement.

We recommend the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), and Eurostat to launch targeted calls in European programmes for projects exploring:

- Cost-effectiveness of co-creation strategies.
- Efficiency trade-offs between short-term and long-term participation outcomes.
- The link between operational models and social impact.

<sup>44</sup> See RECHARGE D3.2.

**We recommend the Eurostat (European statistics) and European and national cultural heritage networks across Europe to co-develop a Europe-wide, open-access evaluation framework that includes qualitative and quantitative indicators of effectiveness and efficiency, covering:<sup>45</sup>**

- Cultural participation and diversity of audiences, capturing who participates, how they participate, and what the outcomes are.
- Community engagement and inclusion, assessing both the scope and the depth of engagement, as well as the impact on inclusion and equity.
- Financial sustainability and operational resilience, measuring both financial health and the ability to adapt, survive, and grow in changing environments.
- Contribution to environmental and social goals, examining both the impact of activities and the processes used to achieve sustainability, inclusion, and well-being.

<sup>45</sup> More details on qualitative and quantitative indicators to evaluate participation can be found at UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culture2030indicators/>; Council of Europe. (2016). Indicator Framework on Culture and Democracy; ICOM toolkit on Sustainability in the Museum Practice: <https://uk.icom.museum/toolkit-on-sustainability-in-the-museum-practice/>.

## 8. Include participant motivation as a key metric in assessing cultural heritage participation.

RECHARGE's research identifies the dual role of intrinsic (e.g., joy, satisfaction) and extrinsic (e.g., recognition, economic reward) motivations for individuals collaborating and participating in cultural heritage activities and decision-making processes.<sup>46</sup> These motivations influence not only why people participate but also how sustainably they remain engaged, especially in voluntary or co-creative roles. This recognition calls for a human-centred cultural policy shift, where both emotional satisfaction and tangible incentives are accounted for in the design of participatory programmes, funding schemes, and organisational strategies. Therefore, understanding why individuals engage with cultural heritage organisations is essential for building meaningful and lasting participation. By integrating motivation for participation into evaluation frameworks, cultural heritage organisations and policymakers can better assess the quality and sustainability of participatory initiatives.

We recommend that European and national policymakers, in collaboration with national and regional/local cultural heritage networks and cultural heritage organisations, expand impact assessment frameworks such as the Europeana Impact Playbook<sup>47</sup> to include motivation-related indicators. These indicators include participant satisfaction, long-term engagement, and engagement tools that highlight different relationships between the community and cultural heritage (e.g. Emotion Networking).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> For more details on the Europeana Impact Playbook, please visit: <https://europeana.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/CB/overview>.

<sup>48</sup> The RECHARGE project has developed a Performance Monitor that includes motivation as one of the indicators of impact. Throughout the project, we have been gathering data from the nine RECHARGE living labs to better understand the relevance and impact of motivation in participatory work. For more details on the results of this specific and focused assessment, see RECHARGE deliverable 3.3, September 2025. For more details on the Emotion Networking framework, please visit: <https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/en/research-group-cultural-heritage/emotion-networking/>.



**We recommend the inclusion of motivation indicators into assessment frameworks and tools for cultural heritage organisations, and by supporting initiatives and projects that focus on:**

- Developing human-centred evaluation templates, including motivation and satisfaction index, as part of cultural funding reporting tools.
- Including qualitative data (testimonies, reflection logs, emotional feedback) alongside quantitative metrics into organisational and project assessment tools.
- Promoting and expanding at the national and local level existing impact assessment tools that recognise and value human-centred relationships with cultural heritage.

**9. Support the establishment of a data collection framework or resource on Cultural Participation to systematically monitor engagement in cultural heritage, inform policymaking, and foster knowledge exchange and capacity-building across the sector.**

Cultural participation is increasingly recognised as a key driver for creation, distribution, capacity building, and cross-sectoral collaboration within the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS).<sup>49</sup> However, there is currently no dedicated, Europe-wide structure that focuses specifically on gathering, analysing, and sharing knowledge and practices related to participation and cross-sector collaboration, especially in and for the cultural heritage sector. Therefore, a European observatory – in the form of an ongoing data/resources platform and a commissioned study – on cultural participation would fill this gap and offer a shared and sustained space for cultural heritage organisations and other stakeholders to collaborate and learn from each other. It would facilitate continuous capacity building, support knowledge and experience exchange, and create mechanisms for meaningful community involvement.

Following on the OMC report on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage,<sup>50</sup> and acknowledging the current negotiation on New Creative Europe Programme, the European Commission is drafting a proposal for the successor to Creative Europe (provisional name: New Creative Europe Programme)<sup>51</sup> that will place emphasis on ‘increasing cross-border cultural creation and cooperation, cultural participation and accessibility to a diversity of European cultural expressions’, RECHARGE recommends the Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) through the support from European and national cultural networks and the European Parliament via the European Parliamentary Research Service (hereafter EPRS) to support and establish a central knowledge hub to monitor, analyse, and disseminate data, practices and policies on participation in cultural heritage organisations across Europe.

<sup>49</sup> See CICERONE project: <https://cicerone-project.eu/>.

<sup>50</sup> European Commission (2018). Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage. Handbook. Brussels: European Union, p. 42-47; and the European Commission. (2019). European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: 10.2766/949707.

<sup>51</sup> Euractiv, European Commission. Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the Programme .... for the Funding Period .... Draft, 2025., p. 3.

The call is for the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to commission an updated study on participatory practices in Cultural Heritage (CH), with the clear intent of using it as a foundation for establishing a knowledge hub. This is intended as a necessary next step to ensure that the data collected is centralised and available, assisting policymakers in decision-making and guiding cultural heritage organisations in implementing efficient participatory processes. The aim of this action is to carry forward the participatory legacy of EYCH 2018 into current cultural policy frameworks<sup>52</sup>.

**The study will include case studies, toolkits, policy reviews, and gathering of comparative data on participation in cultural heritage, and the platform will gather European, regional and local initiatives with a focus on:**

- Gathering of comparative data on participation in cultural heritage organisations and practices.
- Introducing assessment frameworks that prioritise equity, longevity, and innovation in partnerships.<sup>53</sup>
- Offering renewable institutional grants based on evaluation of participatory impact.
- Good practices in which the collaboration among cultural heritage organisations and local communities is experimented with and maintained.
- Good practices in which the collaboration among EU institutions and civil-society organisations is facilitated.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See EPRS, 2025, A New Cultural Compass for Europe.

<sup>53</sup> There are existing initiatives such as the Enumerate Self-assessment tool developed by the Horizon 2020 funded project inDICEs. Assessment frameworks on participation and collaboration can be adapted and incorporated in such initiatives.

<sup>54</sup> The OMC 2012 report emphasised the importance of collaboration among cultural heritage institutions, educational and health sectors, and community organisations. The RECHARGE project builds on these foundations by promoting long-term, participatory models that extend collaboration beyond youth engagement to include broader community involvement.



# Resources

- Council of Europe (2005). Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199). Faro, Portugal: Council of Europe.
- European Commission (2012). Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Working Group of EU Member States' Experts on Better Access to and Wider Participation in Culture (2012). Access to Culture: Final Report. Brussels: European Union. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/documents/2012\\_omc-report-access-to-culture\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/documents/2012_omc-report-access-to-culture_en.pdf).
- European Union (2014). Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage (2014/C 463/01). Official Journal of the European Union.
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- UNV (2021), State of the World's Volunteerism Report.
- European Commission (2023). "2023 New European Bauhaus Progress Report," COM(2023) 24 final, Brussels, 16 January 2023.
- ICOM, Museum Definition, August 2024: <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>



- European Union (2024). Europeans' Attitudes Towards Culture – Special Eurobarometer 562. Report by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM). ISBN 978-92-68-27163-6. DOI: 10.2766/4514147.
- European Parliamentary Research Service (2025). A new Cultural Compass for Europe, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/775842/EPRS\\_BRI\(2025\)775842\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/775842/EPRS_BRI(2025)775842_EN.pdf).
- Euractiv, European Commission. Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the Programme .... for the Funding Period .... Draft, 2025.

## Project resources\*

- RECHARGE project platform: <https://recharge-culture.eu/>
- RECHARGE deliverable 1.1: Typology of Sustainable Financing and Participatory Practices in the Cultural Heritage Sector, September 2023.
- RECHARGE deliverable 1.2: Embracing Participation and Partnerships in the Cultural Heritage Sector, September 2024.
- RECHARGE deliverable 2.2: CH Living Labs, July 2025.
- RECHARGE deliverable 3.1: Report on Resilience in the CHIs - Cultural Volunteering as Catalyst for Participatory Practices, March 2025
- RECHARGE deliverable 3.2: Report on Effectiveness of Cultural Business Models, March 2025.
- RECHARGE project (2025). Playbook on Participatory Cultural Business Models. Version 2.0, July 2025.

\* You can find RECHARGE project resources available at:

<https://zenodo.org/communities/recharge-culture/records> and  
<https://recharge-culture.eu/processes/knowledge-base>

# RECHARGE

Resilient European Cultural Heritage  
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