



# CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACTION

Sharing solutions  
in European  
cities and regions



#EuropeForCulture

## CULTURAL HERITAGE: A POWERFUL CATALYST FOR CITIES AND REGIONS

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# 1. INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACTION: SCOPE AND CONTENT

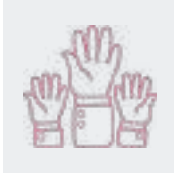
This thematic analysis presents the key findings from Cultural Heritage in Action. It captures the main trends identified during the project (identification of good practices and peer-learning visits) and articulates key learning points, for both policies and projects.

This analysis is mainly aimed at policymakers from European cities and regions, staff from national and European administrations working in the field of culture and cultural heritage, and heritage practitioners.

Throughout the past 18 months, the project has:

- » Mapped out good practices and developed a catalogue of 32 good practices across Europe.
- » Set up 10 peer-learning visits, involving altogether more than 190 cultural practitioners and policy-makers to share knowledge and insights. The value of cultural heritage is incredible, and so is the interest it generates across a diverse range of practitioners. Cultural heritage brings together all sorts of people, professions and skillsets.

Three core topics formed the bedrock of all the project activities:



### **Participatory governance of cultural heritage**

Participatory governance is about people-centred approaches that involve the public sector, private stakeholders and civil society to:

- » co-design cultural heritage policies and programmes
- » share management and safeguarding of cultural heritage
- » increase awareness and valorisation of cultural heritage in communities
- » use cultural heritage as a resource for community and territorial development



### **Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings**

Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings means giving a new use to an obsolete, underused or misused building by making the most of its potentialities. In the adaptive reuse approach, rather than continuing the building's existing use through upgrades or restoring it to a specific time period, the new use is defined and adapted to the building while preserving and respecting its value and significance.



## Quality of interventions on cultural heritage

Interventions on cultural heritage might be risky: improper interventions can put heritage in danger. Quality interventions are essential if we want to bequeath our heritage to future generations – they are the outcome of multiple factors, including aesthetics, habitability, environmental friendliness, accessibility, integration into the surrounding environment and affordability.



This analysis is based on those three topics and also stems from the practical knowledge gained from initiatives led by local authorities.

This analysis is articulated around a main section (section 2) where we discuss the key trends and themes that emerged throughout the discussions of the peer-learning visits and addressing these needs, which notably includes discussions around the management of cultural heritage, the development of partnerships around cultural heritage initiatives, citizens' engagement for and with cultural heritage, and the use of digital tools for innovative heritage projects. The catalogue of good practices also feeds into this section,

We then focus on cultural heritage policies and propose a set of policy recommendations, aiming to further support the development of forward-looking cultural heritage initiatives across Europe. (section 3).



*Sven Christensen from Wood museum (Træmuseet)  
with chair produced at OD furniture.  
Source: Central Denmark region, Denmark.*

## 2. CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CITIES AND REGIONS: KEY TRENDS AND MAIN LEARNING POINTS

Cultural Heritage is an invaluable resource for European cities and regions; it contributes to economic development, social cohesion, and citizens' sense of place across Europe. Cultural heritage and cultural environments, whatever their size and scale, are an essential resource to build identity and a sense of belonging and can serve social cohesion, pride and integration. Thus, it is essential to know your local cultural resources and use them to increase the attractiveness of the place and highlight its identity.

Heritage is a diverse resource. It ranges from tangible culture, which includes buildings, landscapes, historical or industrial sites, books, works of art, artefacts, etc.; to intangible culture, which includes folklore, traditions, language, musical, and audiovisual works, knowledge, etc.; and natural heritage, which includes culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity.

Heritage is also a shared resource. The relevance of cultural heritage is largely defined and determined by the community around it, and its meaning is constantly redefined by communities interacting, reinterpreting, and rethinking cultural heritage.

*Magnus Olesen Furniture in Durup.  
Source: Central Denmark region, Denmark.*

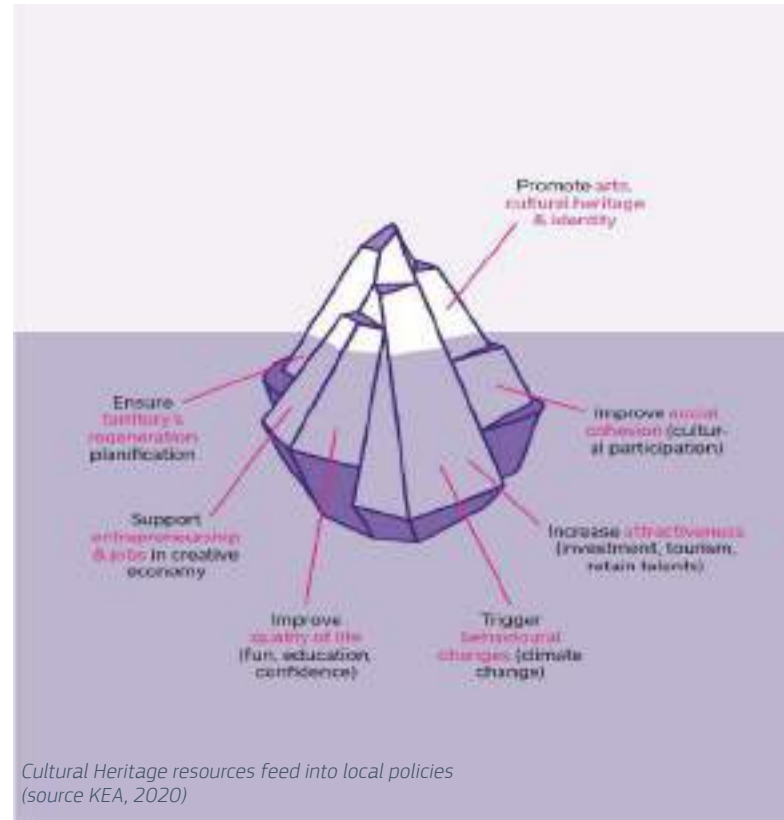




Cultural heritage also connects to a broad range of local policies, as shown in the diagram on the right.

Heritage notably connects with the following policy areas, which we will further discuss in the following chapters:

- » Social cohesion and engaging citizens in dialogues around shared heritage;
- » Urban regeneration, where repurposing heritage buildings contributes to generating new dynamics in neighbourhoods;
- » Skills, entrepreneurship and jobs, for instance by supporting local crafts;
- » City attractiveness and quality of life;
- » Health and well-being;
- » Culture, arts and craft, social innovation



## 2.1 Managing heritage together: governance and partnerships

### ■ WHO'S IN CHARGE? MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE ACROSS EUROPEAN CITIES AND REGIONS

The way cultural heritage is managed is as diverse as the types of heritage resources. Importantly, cultural heritage is part of much wider strategies and vision documents developed by local authorities. It is a cornerstone of the cultural policies of cities and regions, and is also often part of wider blueprints for the development of local authorities. Political vision is particularly important here, in order to embed cultural heritage across key policy areas such as urban planning, social policies and strategies for economic development.

Most cities and regions have a dedicated team managing cultural heritage policies, with teams operating specific projects and institutions. However, many cultural heritage projects actually follow a shared management model involving local associations and citizens themselves, reflecting the importance of participatory approaches to cultural heritage.

Within public administrations, cultural heritage often generates cooperation between different levels of public authorities: shared management models are set up, allowing for multi-layered and cross-sectorial cooperation.

While local authorities are instrumental in supporting cultural heritage projects, flexible management models are often set up. For instance, the initial push for a cultural heritage project may be instigated by public authorities, while local associations then take over the operationalisation. Conversely, local

communities sometimes kickstart a project that is later supported by local authorities, either through dedicated funding or by taking the project under their umbrella.

Cities and regions often set up dedicated organisations to implement cultural heritage projects and policies. The management of cultural heritage has a bearing on the way projects are implemented. The role of arms' length bodies entrusted with cultural heritage management is significant in mediating between local authorities and independent NGOs. In many cases, cultural heritage management is also influenced by international standards. This includes, for instance, management models for UNESCO sites, as well as the European Commission and ICOMOS [guidelines](#) on European quality principles for EU-funded interventions with potential impact upon cultural heritage, the [Leeuwarden declaration](#) on the adaptive reuse of built heritage or the [Davos Declaration 2018](#).



In the Central Denmark region, the Stol (chair) project, which is about reviving the local craft of chair production, provides an interesting model of shared and open governance. The artistic organisation Grasslands designed the project, which was executed with a local working group and a board composed of citizens, artists, fundraisers, curators and volunteers. The Business and Development Department of Skive Municipality oversees the project and partly funds it (together with the Central Denmark region and the ministry of Culture). Partners including professional carpenters, woodworkers, local furniture factories, and local communities were involved. [More info here](#)

*Green Wood technology workshop. Source: Central Denmark region, Denmark.*

## LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Local partnerships are essential in managing cultural heritage assets and resources. As a multifaceted asset, cultural heritage often requires a management model that combines the involvement and oversight of multiple stakeholders, while ensuring the coordination team is empowered to take initiatives and has sufficient leeway to implement projects efficiently.

In inclusive partnerships, private organisations, citizens' groups, NGOs, etc. can contribute to the successful implementation of projects. They often bring in new ideas and perspectives and working with them based on their needs and interests can often bring important synergies for CH projects.



Managing successful projects with multiple stakeholders can be challenging. Here are core principles:

- » Engage politicians actively from the very beginning in the project to gain their support. At least inform them regularly about the project progress and activities. Gain single politicians as ambassadors of your cultural heritage project.
- » Partnerships with universities and vocational centres are very valuable. They provide spaces and opportunities for skills development with communities and audiences that the project team does not usually work with. Additional benefits and skills also stem from working with specific organisations (e.g. social care organisations, local crafts).
- » Working with many partners often means different needs and interests. Try to balance the needs to ensure every partner is benefitting from taking part in the overall project. Be open to adapt your projects so they provide benefits for all stakeholders. Collaborating also means dealing with conflicts. Use the exchange and coordination formats and informal meetings to discuss conflicts and look for solutions. Be transparent in your work.
- » For effective project delivery, have a steering group with decision-making power. This group should include the most relevant stakeholders for implementation. It should meet at regular intervals to discuss and coordinate the project implementation, main problems, etc. This group should have decision-making power and control over the budget. That is why senior management should be members of the steering group. Beyond this steering group, a coordination group to manage single projects, coordinate the preparation and implementation of single projects within the partnership, and technical staff should meet in a coordination group at regular intervals.

- » Be aware that each institution has its own priorities and working rhythm. Organisations work at different speeds – the same with decision-making and funding programmes. Plan sufficient time for coordination and decision-making to be able to work together and ensure there is a match between the activities you plan and the funding you get.



## ■ VALUE YOUR TEAMS

One of the key success factors of cultural heritage projects is great people, both staff and volunteers.

190 city/regions officials, cultural workers and heritage managers were involved in Cultural Heritage in Action online peer-learning visits. They are themselves a great example of the importance of motivated and skilful teams. Their passion, commitment, and skills are invaluable in making all the heritage projects come to life. The activities carried out demonstrated the incredible dynamism of the teams and quick adaptation to the challenges brought up by COVID-19.

Cultural Heritage in Action also showed the importance of appointing strong staff members to build bridges between the various stakeholders to mediate exchanges. Heritage projects are multifaceted and often require different skillsets – for example, the Nantes



*Source: city of Nice, France*



Patrimonia project developed a participatory digital tool to crowdsource information around local heritage. This required a strong curatorial and engagement team to populate the platform with content and involve citizens in the process, as well as technical skills to develop the data modelling behind the digital tool.

Volunteers play an invaluable role in making local projects happen and ensuring they are relevant. Volunteers should be valued properly and benefit from adequate tools, guidance, and training. Making this initial time investment greatly benefits cultural heritage organisations in the long run. The [Adopt a monument project](#) developed in the Tampere region (FI) is a beautiful example.



*Source: city of Tampere, Finland*



## ■ CULTURAL HERITAGE PARTNERSHIPS REQUIRE TRUST

Building trust across the partnership is essential. This is a long-term process, based on robust explanations towards all cooperating organisations as to why the partnership makes sense, as well as openness and honesty in developing the partnership.

Efficient partnerships require defining goals and objectives, which should be defined together and as clearly as possible. Having flat hierarchies helps to strengthen the partnership and offset power imbalances. Strategic decision-making groups in public institutions allow faster decisions and facilitate engagement across institutions. In partnerships, co-create and enable co-decision making as far as possible. Public institutions and councils are often not used or experienced in co-creation and co-decision making. This may require training and capacity building or the support of a neutral and professional person or organisation to build up and facilitate the partnership – at least at the beginning. Conversations with the staff of other organisations offer a lot of informal lessons as well.

Local partnerships can also bring together the stability, permanence and power of public institutions and the agility, openness and flexibility of grassroots organisations.

Best practice examples ensure there are open spaces for discussions with free communication and accessible language. Otherwise, websites and official documents become the point of reference to start the partnerships and discussions, where language is often very institutional and distant from other organisations. Intermediary body, e.g. independent NGOs or arms' length public body, can also help to bridge issues of trust and convey the right messages to their communities.

## WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES: KEY TIPS AND TRICKS

The recent uptick in encouragement in citizens participation and empowerment in the life of the city/region is a driver of change. Art and culture are essential to enable such participation and engagement. They can ensure a more cohesive society and build confidence for citizens to feel ready to confront various challenges (climate change, resilience, well-being, security or identity issues). Citizens' empowerment, in turn, contributes to a more democratic society that values freedom of expression and social engagement.

Co-creation and participatory activities are now an integral part of local cultural policies and are increasingly being implemented. These processes illustrate how art and cultural heritage can be a driver for change in society, how art and cultural heritage have the power to address social issues and challenges.



The collaborative archive model of DIG IT UP in Rotterdam (a formalised cultural heritage collection process to enrich the city's historical archives through crowdsourcing) proves that designing a collaborative partnership between city archives and grassroots cultural heritage organisation can help to combine the 'best of both worlds'. The public institutions contribute staff to sustain the partnership, funds and spaces to exhibit the heritage collections, while the DIG IT UP association connects more easily to different communities in Rotterdam. In addition, the project adds the results of DIG IT UP crowdsourcing collections to the public archive and thus makes them accessible to a larger public.

*Source: city of Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

Involving citizens in the management, research, valuation, and ownership of their cultural heritage is essential to make the most of cultural heritage and ensure it remains relevant over time.

This requires that the city defines what it expects from the cooperation and participation from the beginning of the project. Before starting a collaborative approach, the city administration defined the reasons for involving each of the core stakeholders, e.g. to gain knowledge and understanding and to develop actions the stakeholders feel ownership for.

An essential aspect of the collaborative approach is identifying and involving core stakeholders at the beginning of the process based on their interests. Planning sufficient time for activation activities and pilot projects helps to bring people together.

*Collecting names with elderly locals.  
Source: Gorenjska region, Slovenia.*



Citizens' participation can be:

- » supported through artistic interventions. For example, in Kortrijk, the city sought to revive the tradition of city giants through a contemporary and participatory method. An artistic intervention invited citizens to invent, design and build new giants representing the diversity of the city. You can read more about Emma, the city's new giant and the outcome of the intervention [here](#).
- » triggered by local cultural institutions (for example, Kortrijk's forthcoming local museum on identity is collecting personal stories from inhabitants).
- » embedded in the development of a city's cultural strategy, such as Kortrijk's attempt to become European Capital of Culture in 2030.

Local cultural heritage can be reinvented with the participation of citizens and relevant organisations, allowing new connections between the past and the future of a place.



*Emma.*  
*Source: city of Kortrijk, Belgium*

The activities of Cultural Heritage in Action highlighted a few core principles to community involvement:

- » To engage your communities, you have to know who you want to reach. Define which communities you want to involve and think about how to reach them.
- » Build trust before going into the full delivery stage of a project (especially when local authorities are perceived in a negative way). Use liaisons and organisation that are already in touch with the community groups you want to engage. Visit communities where they live instead of 'telling' them to come to you. Make them feel valued and respected.
- » Reach out to 'all' communities. Take a step back and make sure there are no 'blind spots' (e.g. whole communities that are ignored because they are outside usual communication channels) and bring in new expertise/partners if needed. To reach out to harder to reach communities, get support from people and institutions that are already in touch with them or that are professionals in contacting such groups. Speak in their language and avoid technical talks and expressions.
- » Community engagement is a permanent task and requires continuous contact persons and non-negligible human resources. Therefore, it is vital to institutionalise community engagement in an organisation, with corresponding time and staff resources – and budget. Staff in charge might be lacking experience and know-how in the beginning. Provide training, guidelines and exchange of experience on how to successfully involve communities in projects.

- » Open calls and consultations work well to remove ‘ownership landmines’ (e.g. tensions from one particular group that feels it ‘owns’ a heritage site). Time is a key aspect of expectation management: enough time should be dedicated to the consultations to ensure a good understanding of the project. Embed co-design of projects at the earliest stage possible and take on board the needs expressed when planning the actual calls for projects or the funding pipeline.
- » Support communities in planning and implementing their project ideas, but do not do the project for them – it is about engagement and doing ‘with them’. Participation is time-consuming for those involved. It should therefore be as rewarding and fun as possible. Low-threshold activities work well (pop-up opportunities) and try to organise the participatory activities close to where the communities are (i.e. Christmas market or at a bus stop).

Developing a community project and participatory activities does not mean public authorities are ‘stepping back’. In fact, ensuring political and administrative support is a core pillar of successful participatory projects. Community engagement needs resources: staff, time, budget. Support from the highest decision-makers (mayor and head of departments) is key. Without them, the road will be rocky.

## 2.2 Cultural Heritage bridging with wider local policies

### ■ CROSS-SECTORIAL COOPERATION TO MAKE THE MOST OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Managing heritage in a meaningful way requires a multipolar approach – due to its proteiform nature (diverse forms of heritage) and to its various impacts for our cities and regions.

The [city of Vantaa](#) has successfully applied methods of cross-sectoral collaboration, both within the city departments and with external stakeholders through a cross-sectoral committee. In the ‘Committee for cultural environments’ the culture and urban environment departments met with experts to prepare and discuss the content of the cultural environmental preservation, which helped to bridge sectoral thinking and to better understand each other’s perspectives. Such cross-sectorial cooperation helps to place cultural heritage at the centre of discussions and come up with a shared understanding and common ground for actions.

The [Cloisters of San Pietro in the city of Regio Emilia](#) became an open space for culture and an incubator for digital transformation

*Photo by Francesca Vezzani;  
Source: Comune Reggio Emilia, Italy*





and social innovation projects and is an example of repurposing cultural heritage towards multiple policy areas. Cross-disciplinarity was a core principle for the establishment of an Open Hub to host cultural events (in particular for contemporary arts), educational programmes as well as training in creative and digital skills. The hub is managed by a local consortium of social cooperatives (through a public tender), working in diverse areas including the social, education and cultural sectors.

For cross-sectoral cooperation projects, it is recommended to have a full time and experienced person in charge of the conception, preparation, moderation and follow up of the meetings, guiding the participants to a common target and ensuring that the meetings are beneficial for the participating parties. This ensures their constant and active participation. Cross-sectoral collaboration works better when there are incentives to collaborate. Such committees should not be limited to public institutions. Informal settings and neutral spaces also ease cross-sectoral collaborations (also to avoid giving the impression a project is 'owned' by a particular department or organisation).

*Source: city of Nantes, France*





## ■ CULTURAL HERITAGE AS IMPETUS TO DISCUSS WIDER WICKED SOCIETAL ISSUES.

Cultural heritage is very much an anchor point in cities and regions. It contributes to assembling shared memories of citizens, opening up public discussions around key issues for citizens, and increasing social inclusion and involvement of vulnerable communities through cultural heritage.

### **Cultural heritage and well-being**

Cultural Heritage makes a significant contribution to increasing well-being in the community. Residents wish to 'feel at home' and be part of a distinctive community with an identity. This contributes to social cohesion and harmony.

### **Cultural heritage empowering social dialogues**

The strong participatory element of cultural heritage initiatives is an opportunity to engage and empower citizens. Examples include events, walks, competition, food gatherings in Vantaa, or, in the city of Rijeka, a programme of artistic intervention aimed at triggering citizens' participation and engagement during the European Capital of Culture year in 2020. Artistic interventions are powerful tools to trigger citizens participation. Cultural investments contribute to social policy in the city (integration, intergenerational dialogue).

## REVITALISATION, REGENERATION – THE VALUE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TO DRIVE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

A strong cultural offer makes a territory more attractive, enabling retaining or attracting talent that wishes to live in vibrant cities. For instance, the [City of Vantaa](#) uses its cultural heritage to develop a service economy (bars, restaurant, micro-brewery) that improves the urban experience. Thus, culture is key in the experience economy and makes places attractive to settle or invest in. Quality of life, served by a strong cultural offer, is essential to local economic development.

Cultural investments should be seen as essential to local economic development (real estate, industrial or service-based) and territorial attractiveness. Cultural policy should make the most of local cultural and creative industries (working with the local game company, for instance, in developing story-telling and interactive apps or with local artists – street art and festivals).



The Fortress of Culture in Sibenik offers an excellent example of heritage as a driver for economic development. Through different sites across the city, it attracts more than 200,000 visitors per year and has quickly become the main 'selling point' of the city for its territorial marketing and branding.

With more than 2000 media releases per year, its branding and marketing value is estimated at over €5 million. It generates more than €1 million per year in ticket revenues and is financially self-sufficient in its daily operations. More information is available [here](#).

## ■ DIGITAL SOLUTIONS AND HERITAGE-LED INNOVATION

Digital solutions are increasingly used in cultural heritage initiatives as a way to encourage community projects and develop shared solutions, as well as reach out to new audiences.

Using the right tools to collect and organise materials matters as it conditions the way you can design participatory approaches to collect, assemble and open access to digital heritage. Open data and collaborative software solutions are required to develop a participatory model for digital heritage projects. For example, 'Dig it up', the above-mentioned collaborative archive in Rotterdam, uses Omeka-S, open-source software which enables the project team to crowdsource archive content. Well-designed standards and guidelines are paramount for any project involving shared digital tools. Having clear and streamlined guidelines is an important prerequisite to ensure a coherent approach is used by all participants. The next step should be reviewing the information provided, liaising with volunteers to make any adaptations required, and collecting additional information.

The use of international standards is recommended to ensure compliance with regulations, as well as benefit from templates and guidelines developed by other heritage institutions across Europe. This also facilitates international data sharing. The language used should be accessible when working with communities so that everyone feels comfortable. The whole technical design should be done before onboarding communities and volunteers.

Digital solutions are often developed to work more closely with younger audiences. For instance, virtual games to involve the youth and children were developed in Vantaa or Central Scotland in order to raise the awareness of children and youth about cultural heritage. The city of Vantaa developed a digital game in the style of Pokemon Go which can be found [here](#) and in [this video](#). In Central Scotland, augmented reality games were also developed to help younger people rediscover their Roman heritage through digital reconstitutions of the Antonine Wall (more information on this is available in the [study visit report in Central Scotland](#)). Social media was also used to reach young adults.



*Playpark at Callendar Park.  
Source: Historic Environment Scotland*

## 2.3 COVID-19 pandemic and cultural heritage: impacts, strategies and new developments at local and regional levels

COVID-19 had dramatic impacts on cultural heritage organisations in terms of revenue losses and lost audiences. This was shared by most participants to the peer-learning visits, especially for organisations that heavily depended on events and ticket revenues. The immediate shift towards non-physical interactions was also challenging in terms of reaching out to communities where no digital link was established.

This was particularly challenging for cities/organisations which had ongoing projects with key landmarks (e.g. opening of a new venue), and where all financial modelling and strategic planning was designed around such landmarks. Relief funding did help in some cases but was deemed insufficient by most organisations.

Some positive developments for cultural heritage can nonetheless be observed across Europe:

- » The shift to online tools allowed new means of communication with people and almost more communication/outreach took place during the lockdown periods. The pandemic also led to opportunities for projects left aside and unboxing ideas that did not necessarily have priority (e.g. deepening knowledge of cultural heritage sites, thinking of new tours and ways of demonstrating the value of cultural heritage). New projects and solutions emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- » The sudden stopping of activities spurred rethinking and diversification across many organisations, turning to digital solutions to remain active. Overall, most participants noted that they could reach out to new audiences. However, not all communities they have been working with can be reached with digital communications. The assessment is mixed: some important successes, but also lost relationships. There are overlaps between digital and on-site engagement strategies, but also a clear need to relaunch many 'activation' projects and events. Coping with the pandemic also revealed several important considerations for future digital strategies. Developing new content (videos, podcast, 3D modelling) is interesting and lasts over time. However, it can be costly to produce and requires promotion over time.
- » Managing uncertainty and planning during a pandemic requires new management models. Participants flagged the importance of investing in spaces where communities can meet safely and support exchanges, community development, and resilience building. Another idea included providing incentives to existing grant schemes by allocating additional budget for COVID-proof events (providing extra funding to cover the costs).



Museo Patrimonio Industriale,  
Source: city of Bologna, Italy.

### 3. FROM CULTURAL HERITAGE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES TO SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE POLICIES

Cultural Heritage is an invaluable resource for European cities and regions, but it needs to be adequately nurtured, managed and sustained. The previous section looked at the main trends shaping how cultural heritage projects can deliver outstanding impacts throughout European cities and regions, while this chapter discusses the main aspects of cultural policies.

Cultural heritage policy needs to consider all types of cultural heritage. This ranges from tangible culture, including buildings, landscapes, historic sites, books, works of art, artefacts, etc.; to intangible culture, including folklore, traditions, language, musical, and audiovisual works, knowledge, etc.; and natural heritage, including culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity.

This means that understanding cultural heritage resources and their diversity requires mapping and analysis. Although cultural heritage policies are increasingly based on evidence and research, additional efforts are required to ensure the diversity of heritage assets is well-understood.

Cultural heritage policies should be accessible to all whether in schools, universities, museums, heritage and cultural sites, or venues (theatres, cinemas, live events) and media channels (linear and nonlinear). The development of 'low-threshold' projects (e.g. in Kortrijk, where a multitude of cultural small heritage projects are linked to social activities at bars/café, or at a Christmas market) is particularly helpful in that respect to onboard new audiences.

Cultural heritage policy relies on the mutual commitment of citizens, the education community, cultural associations, cultural enterprises, and public authorities. Therefore, cultural policy should associate all these stakeholders in its development and implementation. Cultural heritage policy is about doing together and empowering cultural stakeholders to facilitate collective expression and representation in public policies.

Cultural heritage policy plays a decisive role in enabling the development of local creative ecosystems associating creative and artistic disciplines in cross-disciplinary activities, notably with science and technology, as well as crafts and tourism.

By fostering the development of creative hubs and cultural incubators or maker spaces, cultural heritage policy can support entrepreneurship, innovation, urban and rural regeneration, sustainable tourism as well as quality of life. Adaptive reuse of cultural heritage is becoming part of urban regeneration strategies across Europe.



**A dynamic city in Belgium, Kortrijk has been experimenting for several years with projects on citizen' participation and participatory governance. In the new administrative agreement 2020-2025, the city government established the involvement of its citizens in the co-creation of urban projects as a priority. More information can be found in the Cultural Heritage in Action's study visit in Kortrijk here.**

*Source: city of Kortrijk, Belgium*



One good example comes from Reggio Emilia ([Reggio Emilia – Open hub in the ancient San Peters’ Cloisters](#)), where cultural heritage supports the social innovation and urban digital transformation. A former cloisters now provides co-working spaces for entrepreneurs to prototype new goods and services, bringing work and production back to the historic city centre.



*San Pietro Complex.  
Source: Comune Reggio Emilia*

## 3.1 Your 10 steps to sustainable local cultural heritage policies



1

Make sure that **political support** for cultural heritage is valued by policy-makers and forms part of all key strategic documents.



2

Understand (and map) the environment you operate in and the stakeholders you should work with, and ensure you ground your heritage policies on **a robust understanding of your local ecosystem**, the main heritage resources you have and how you can make the most of them.



3

Develop **a strategic vision**: setting clear goals and objectives will enable you to develop cross-sectorial cooperation and onboard partners in a natural way.



4

**Plan in advance participatory processes and multi-stakeholder involvement**, and take time to ensure you reach a consensus. Set up **dedicated teams** to manage consultation and engagement to ensure participants are not only consulted but rather in dialogue with your team.



5

Set out **clear criteria for the quality of cultural heritage projects**, including guidelines and shared resources.



Develop **adequate structures** and maintain the right **balance** between involving all key stakeholders and giving room for manoeuvre to the teams managing your cultural heritage projects.



Compose **the right teams with adequate skillsets**, including digital and technical skills: managing digital projects requires capable project managers to make sure you do not end up with obsolete apps or other digital solutions. Get external support if you need: cultural heritage has many facets and requires a broad array of skills.



Align **timelines, budgetary constraints** (which differ between the organisations you involve) and **expectations**.



**Assess your blind spots** and make sure you are not only working with your own usual suspects. Develop **alternative ways of communicating** and reaching out to cater to the needs of diverse communities.



**Monitor, evaluate and rethink** at all key steps of your cultural heritage projects.

## 3.2 Policy recommendations to make the most of cultural heritage in cities and regions

The policy recommendations provided below aim to make the most of cultural heritage across Europe – a unique resource for our cities and regions. While they mostly address local authorities, many of the recommendations can also be addressed at EU level, especially in the context of funding programmes for territorial cooperation.

Cultural heritage policies seek to address different types of needs. Throughout our interactions with cities and regions, we identified a set of challenges they are seeking to address, and developed a set of recommendations accordingly:

*PSML-Luis Duarte. City of Sintra, Portugal*



## ■ CHALLENGE 1: SOLVING WICKED SOCIAL ISSUES AND ENABLING DIALOGUE WITH LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS

### Enable dialogue through collaborative spaces and tools

Ensure there are open spaces for discussions, with free communication and open language. These open spaces can be heritage buildings themselves, as well as digital participative tools. Be they digital or physical, these spaces should be open and accessible for citizens and local associations. The regular use of small 'low-threshold' activities helps to build momentum for such projects and connect to diverse groups.

### Working with excluded groups and harder to reach communities

Working with diverse groups and communities first requires an analysis of your blind spots to understand who you're missing in your activities and outreach strategy. Developing a relationship with excluded groups, understanding the right communication channels (e.g. local associations, places these groups) will help you to use the right messages/language. Cultural heritage can be a powerful tool to achieve this and help different groups to connect with different stories and interpretations around a shared resource.

## ■ CHALLENGE 2: SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ACTIVATING NEW PUBLIC SPACES

**Nurturing and sustaining heritage: ensuring core funding is available for projects.**

Many cultural heritage projects were made possible thanks to EU funding and in particular the European Structural and Investment Funds. Ensuring such funding remains open to heritage projects is essential. Member states are finalising their recovery plans and partnership agreements, where culture and heritage need to be identified amongst their priorities to unlock future opportunities.

**Communities of practice: support professional exchanges and knowledge-sharing**

Initial guidance, templates and shared resources are highly valuable for heritage professionals, especially when developing projects involving diverse communities or dealing with sensitive or 'dissonant' heritage. A forum for professional exchanges is very much in demand, and associating policy-makers from different departments and heritage professionals represents a great added value to design heritage policies and projects.

■ **CHALLENGE 3:  
JOB CREATION – LOCAL CRAFTSMANSHIP, TOURISM:  
NURTURE A CULTURAL HERITAGE ECOSYSTEM**

**Leverage on the power of cultural heritage to open opportunities for local cultural and creative industries**

Cultural heritage can generate opportunities for your local creative industries, be it in terms of supplying content to heritage institutions, or simply for local craftsmen to sustain their know-how of working on particular types of heritage.

**Develop tools for evaluation, monitoring and measuring impacts**

Cultural heritage makes an invaluable contribution to local and regional development, yet it is often still underestimated and undervalued. Cultural heritage policies and projects must be subject to research work (including strong statistics) and evaluation to monitor the impact of policy actions.

*Source: Saaremaa, Estonia*



## CHALLENGE 4: DEVELOPING LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

### Support participatory approaches to cultural heritage

Ensure cultural heritage is truly a shared resource and becomes as meaningful as possible to your communities. Participatory projects and community involvement require a well-designed approach and skilled staff (or external resources), but investing in this will reap incredible benefits. European cooperation to share methodologies, resources and approaches is highly valuable, as noted by many participants.

*Source: Val Grande National Park, Italy*





## ■ CHALLENGE 5: EMPOWERING CITIZENS AND ONBOARDING COMMUNITIES AROUND SHARED PROJECTS

### Develop tools and mechanisms for open cooperation

Open cooperation and participatory processes require dedicated spaces, be they virtual (digital tools and solutions) or physical (open spaces for consultations, workshops with citizens).

Developing adequate tools and resources for such dialogue will help to build trust with citizens and associations. It is essential to engage them in meaningful dialogue: provide opportunities for the discussions to continue beyond your own activities so that cultural heritage is truly owned by everyone.

### Invest in the digitalisation of cultural heritage

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is devastating for the cultural and creative sectors, and cultural heritage is heavily affected. It also evidenced the challenge of digitalisation in the sector, be it in terms of basic equipment, in terms of staff with digital literacy and skills development, or more broadly in terms of digitising cultural heritage content, especially for non-accessible heritage.

Beyond the pandemic, investing in the digitalisation of cultural heritage projects is also an opportunity to develop more cross-sectorial cooperation, or simply to develop new digital tools attracting diverse audiences and especially younger generations.

## 4. CONCLUSION

“Our European Cultural Heritage is unique. It is a bridge that connects our past, our present and our future. It belongs to all of us. It is part of who we are.”

**- Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth**

To conclude, heritage is a diverse resource, and a shared resource. It is a living resource as well: the relevance and the meaning of cultural heritage is constantly redefined by communities interacting, reinterpreting, and rethinking cultural heritage. In short, cultural heritage is an invaluable resource for European cities and regions; it contributes to economic development, social cohesion and the sense of place of citizens across Europe.

Perhaps most importantly, cultural heritage needs to be considered adequately, and it needs to be nurtured. We hope this analysis will help policy-makers in this endeavour.



Source: city of Bologna, Italy



