



# eNCATC

The European network on cultural  
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# Culture that counts



Photo - Dynaminc Wang

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# Editorial

## Culture that Counts: Evidence, Meaning, Responsibility

As we approach the post-2030 horizon, culture is moving—finally—from the margins of policy discourse to its foundations. Not as an ornament of development, but as a force that shapes how societies interpret risk, imagine futures, and decide what is worth protecting. This issue of ENCATC Magazine, *Culture that Counts*, is an invitation to take that shift seriously, and to examine what it demands of our sector: more precision in how we **count** culture, and more courage in how we **recount** it.

Counting, here, is not shorthand for reducing culture to numbers. It is a commitment to visibility: to the infrastructures, methods, and shared languages that allow cultural realities to be understood, debated, and acted upon. In Italy, the evolution of cultural observatories reveals both the promise and the limits of measurement—an expanding capacity to map supply, demand, funding, employment, venues, and increasingly also sustainability and training needs, alongside a persistent recognition that data sets remain incomplete, and that interpretation matters as much as collection. Observatories, at their best, do more than report: they convene, translate, and make complexity usable without flattening it. They remind us that the question is not “do we have data?”, but “do we have the right questions, and the institutional capacity to learn from the answers?”

This issue also shows why counting must become a shared practice. “Impact” can intimidate cultural organisations—especially when it is framed as compliance, audit, or political expectation. The *Data Conversations for Impact* initiative points to an alternative: impact as a collective inquiry, grounded in data literacy and organisational learning. The early findings are telling: many organisations recognise the need for impact work, yet far fewer use it systematically to improve internal practice; reporting tends to flow upwards to public authorities more than outwards to citizens; and non-monetary value is widely desired, but no single “golden indicator” can hold the richness of cultural life. What emerges is less a deficit than a design challenge: to build tools, habits, and facilitation models that make data meaningful in everyday cultural work—so that accountability does not come at the cost of integrity.

Recounting, on the other hand, is about meaning-making—about the narratives through which cultures recognise themselves and others. In Osaka, the 2025 World Expo becomes a lens on competitive identity: national pavilions as carefully staged arguments about legacy, power, and sustainability; dreams not merely displayed, but sold. Such performances matter because they influence how publics and



policymakers understand “the future”—what gets legitimised, what gets obscured, and who gets to be credible. Recounting culture is therefore not a rhetorical flourish; it is an ethical responsibility. When cultural narratives are misaligned with lived realities, they become fragile. When they are honest, plural, and grounded, they become infrastructures of trust.

This brings us to the most urgent form of counting and recounting: cultural heritage under threat. From Ukraine, we learn how protection becomes a matter of preparedness, skills development, and international cooperation—where training, mobile response units, shared protocols, and professional networks make the difference between irreversible loss and recoverable damage. The lesson is not only about crisis response. It is about what Europe—and the wider international community—chooses to value, and how rapidly it can mobilise knowledge, resources, and solidarity around that value.

Finally, culture that counts requires **people**—and the conditions that allow them to lead, learn, and remain in the sector. Social sustainability is no longer an optional discussion. Leadership without preparation is not a rite of passage; it is a systemic risk. Evidence from Finland highlights gaps in training, onboarding, legal literacy, and resourcing that cascade into burnout and organisational fragility—precisely at a time when many institutions are asked to demonstrate social responsibility through ESG commitments. Against that backdrop, ENCATC’s Collective Mentoring Programme offers a different model: a community of practice built on collective learning and peer exchange, designed for the green, digital, and social transformations shaping cultural work today.

ENCATC exists to connect research, education, policy, and practice—so that cultural decisions are informed, inclusive, and sustainable. In this issue, the message is simple: the future will not be secured by numbers alone, nor by stories alone, but by the alignment of evidence and meaning. Culture counts when we build the tools to understand it, the languages to articulate it, and the working conditions to sustain those who carry it.

GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens  
ENCATC Secretary General

*December 2025*

*GiannaLia*



# "THE FUTURE IS CULTURAL"

An interview with

**Gerald Lidstone**

by GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens



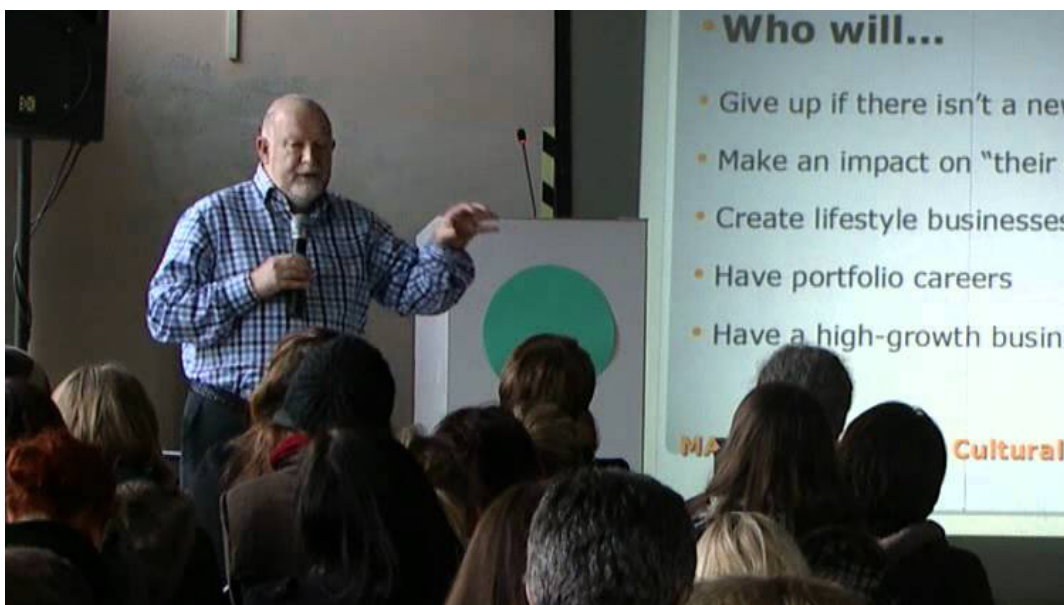
As the world approaches the post-2030 horizon, a quiet but profound shift is underway in global policy circles: culture is no longer treated as a decorative afterthought. It is emerging as a structural force—a framework for understanding, envisioning, and building the future.

Few people articulate this shift as clearly as Gerald Lidstone, whose opening address at the ENCATC Congress 2025 sets out a bold argument: *the future is not technological, economic, or political — the future is cultural.*

In this interview, **GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens**, ENCATC's Secretary General, speaks with **Gerald Lidstone**—ENCATC President—who reflects on why culture is becoming indispensable to sustainable development, and why storytelling may be the most powerful tool we have for navigating global transformation.

**GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens (GCB):** Gerald, your opening address for the ENCATC Congress 2025 sets a powerful tone. You argue that culture is not just an add on to sustainable development but its backbone. Why did you feel it was important to make that point so strongly now?

**Gerald Lidstone (GL):** Because we've reached a moment where the world is looking beyond 2030 and realising that the frameworks we've relied on are no longer enough. Culture has always shaped how societies think, behave, and imagine the future. Yet it's still treated as secondary in policy. I wanted to make it clear: without cultural values, systems, and—crucially—storytelling, we cannot build regenerative, equitable futures. Culture is not decoration; it's infrastructure.



Gerald Lidstone teaching in Riga, Latvia

**GCB:** You emphasise storytelling as essential to understanding everything from global security to digital transformation. Why storytelling specifically?

**GL:** Storytelling is the connective tissue of society. It's how we understand ourselves and others. Without storytellers—whether in theatre, dance, gaming, literature, podcasts, or visual arts—we lose the ability to interpret complexity. Think about AI, climate change, ageing, or global conflict. Science can give us data, but culture gives us meaning. Stories help us navigate ethical dilemmas, imagine alternatives, and empathise across difference. Without them, we are poorer socially, aesthetically, and economically.

**GCB:** You also challenge the audience to stop relying on "they"—governments, foundations, international organisations—to act. That's a provocative stance.

**GL:** It's necessary. In conferences, we often conclude with "they should do something." But the truth is: they rarely do unless we show the way. Cultural actors, educators, researchers, and practitioners must take responsibility. We have the evidence, the creativity, and the networks to influence policy. Waiting for others is no longer an option.

**GCB:** You also speak about crisis—not as an exception but as a constant. How does culture help us navigate that?



**GL:** Crisis is not new. What's new is the immediacy with which media brings it into our homes. That can be overwhelming. Culture provides the tools to process, discuss, and understand these realities. It gives us dialogue, reflection, and imagination. It helps us resist apathy. And importantly, it reminds us that we are part of global and local politics whether we like it or not.

**GCB:** One of the strengths of ENCATC is its partnerships—UNESCO, the Compendium of Cultural Policies, European frameworks. How do you see these collaborations shaping the future?



Gerald Lidstone teaching in Vietnam

**GL:** They're essential. Our work with MONDIACULT, for example, allows us to bring the voices of our members directly into global cultural policy. The fact that culture was recognised as a global public good in 2022 was not accidental—it was the result of sustained advocacy. ENCATC's role is to connect research, practice, and policy so that culture is embedded in development agendas, not treated as an afterthought.

**GCB:** This year we also honour Ernesto Ottone Ramírez with the ENCATC Award for Outstanding Contribution. What does his recognition signify?

**GL:** Ernesto embodies the integration of cultural policy, heritage protection, and creative industries at the highest level. His leadership at UNESCO has been pivotal in reframing culture as central to sustainable development, social inclusion, and peace. Recognising him is also recognising the direction we believe the world must take: culture as a global public good, not a luxury.

**GCB:** You end your address with a strong message: audiences don't come to cultural organisations for diversity or sustainability—they come because we say something important. What do you hope cultural leaders take from that?

**GL:** That values like diversity, sustainability, and equity must be embedded in everything we do—but they are not the reason audiences engage. People come because culture speaks to them, challenges them, moves them. If we want to have impact, we must be bold. We must take positions, express ideas, and contribute meaningfully to public discourse. The future is cultural because culture is where meaning is made.

**GCB:** Gerald, thank you. Your words remind us that culture is not only a sector—it's a force shaping how societies imagine and build their futures.



## GERALD LIDSTONE

*Goldsmiths, University of London  
(United Kingdom)*

Gerald is a Research and Knowledge Exchange Fellow for the Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship (ICCE) at Goldsmiths University of London. He was a founder and director of ICCE until 2024. He was the founder of the MA in Arts Administration and Cultural Policy, now established for more than 30 years. Gerald created and ran a MA in cultural industries in Abu Dhabi for three years and worked for over twelve years on behalf of The Ministry of Culture and Information in Viet Nam establishing Arts Management education in Hanoi University of Culture, funded by the Ford Foundation. He was awarded the national medal for culture in Viet Nam. In the last five years he led on a partnership of Creative Spark in Uzbekistan. For the British Council and other agencies, he has taught Arts Management courses in over 20 countries. Gerald holds 3 honorary doctorates and was ENCATC President from 2020-25.





## EVOLUTION AND PROSPECTS OF CULTURAL OBSERVATORIES IN ITALY



**Antonio Taormina**

*Cultural analyst and former  
member of the High Council  
for the Performing Arts at the  
Italian Ministry of Culture*

### Premises

In Italy, the process leading to the establishment of Cultural Observatories began, as in the rest of Europe, in the last few decades – a period in which information and knowledge started to be perceived as fundamental levers for political, social, cultural, and economic development (Ortega Nuere, 2011). Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, the cultural sector underwent significant changes fostered by the increase in public investment, the evolution of cultural consumption, and the new functions assigned to the Regions. Following the 1977 law of the State, which defined their role in cultural matters, the Regions began to issue their own regulations. During the same period, public institutions and the academic world recognized the need for advanced tools to better understand the sector from economic, structural, and social perspectives.



## Information and knowledge started to be perceived as fundamental levers for political, social, cultural, and economic development

The genesis of Italian Cultural Observatories finds its foundational reference in the establishment, in 1985, of an Observatory at the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment<sup>1</sup>. The objective was to create "a flexible and technically equipped structure, capable of collecting information on performing arts in Italy and abroad and making it available to decision-making bodies." This initiative paved the way for studies, conferences, and research projects promoted by territorial entities, universities, and research institutes, laying the groundwork for regional observatories on culture and the performing arts (Taormina, 2023).

The process began with the establishment, in 1988, of the *Cultural Observatory of the Lombardy Region*. It was followed in 1996 by the *Permanent Observatory on the Economy of Culture in Emilia-Romagna*, later transformed in 1999 into the first regional observatory dedicated to performing arts, managed by *ATER – Associazione Teatrale Emilia-Romagna*, and subsequently extended to the entire cultural sector. In 1998, the *Cultural Observatory of Piedmont (OCP)* was created with the support of public and private partners, including the Fitzcarraldo Foundation, thereby consolidating a model of collaboration between institutions and local actors.



Italy, Metropolitan City of Venice (Unsplash)

### Models and Areas of Investigation

In Italy, Cultural Observatories experienced their greatest expansion in the 2000s, encouraged by the reform of Title V of the Constitution in 2001, which strengthened the role of the Regions in matters concerning the performing arts. The *Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces* played a decisive role, proposing in 2006 the creation of a

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<sup>1</sup>Law of 30 April 1985, No. 163, "Nuova disciplina degli interventi dello Stato a favore dello spettacolo" – Articolo 5 (GU Serie Generale n.104 del 04-05-1985).

national network of observatories, the opening of new regional observatories, and the development of a shared system for the collection and analysis of data concerning policies for the performing arts. Between 2007 and 2013, the Regions, in collaboration with the *Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities*, the *National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI)* and the *Union of Italian Provinces (UPI)*, implemented the *ORMA Project*, with the support of *ISTAT* (Italian National Institute of Statistics), with the aim of standardizing surveys and improving knowledge of the sector.

In Italy, the landscape of observatories established by the Regions initially showed a distinction between observatories devoted exclusively to performing and audiovisual arts, and generalist observatories that addressed all cultural domains. Over time, this difference has gradually reduced. At present, fourteen Regions have established observatories based on sectoral laws or specific provisions, although not all of them operate regularly. The objectives of the observatories largely reflect the knowledge needs of the public bodies that promoted them. In the initial stages, the main areas of analysis concerned demand and supply, economic and financial data, employment, and cultural venues.

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Over time, there has been a growing tendency to privilege the acquisition and processing of statistical data, emphasizing the heuristic value of numbers. However, as noted by the director of the OCP, Luca Dal Pozzolo, the set of available data, though extensive, remains incomplete; it is therefore necessary to bring to light and discuss what figures alone cannot clearly express (Dal Pozzolo, 2023).

This awareness has led to a broader reflection on the role of Cultural Observatories: not only as tools of information and decision-making support, but as autonomous actors capable of contributing to an overall understanding of the cultural sector. Only later did some observatories begin to introduce studies on economic and social impacts, qualitative audience studies, environmental sustainability, and also on training demand and supply (Lluís Bonet).

### **New Challenges and Prospects**

In light of the experience gained, there emerges the need to overcome rigid frameworks in the management and models of cultural observatories. The sector is in constant evolution, and cultural domains are continuously being redefined, making it necessary to update fields of investigation and research activities. Cultural observation must remain a priority for institutions and organizations, ensuring scientific rigor and the ability to interpret data.

As J. Mark Schuster already noted in 2002, cultural observatories do not constitute a homogeneous entity: under a single category coexist different models of research and information bodies.

In this regard, it should be emphasized that, starting from the past decade, the central role of bodies that, in fact, also act as cultural observatories – although this is not their

primary function – has gradually been established. Studies, monitoring activities, and periodic reports produced by entities such as the *Symbola Foundation* (associated with ENCATC) have become points of reference for the entire sector. The Foundation, through its annual report on cultural and creative industries *Io Sono Cultura* ("I Am Culture"), provides updated analyses, comparable data, and useful tools for understanding the dynamics of the cultural system, according to an innovative vision.

The importance of the role played by cultural observatories became fully evident during the pandemic emergency that began in 2020, which highlighted – among the latent criticalities of the cultural system – the lack of structured data that would have made it possible to assess the impact of restrictions on cultural participation, training processes, and social repercussions. The pandemic demonstrated that monitoring must go beyond purely quantitative aspects and include qualitative assessments.

The national legislator revisited the issue in the 2022 law on the Performing Arts, which provides for the creation of a *National Network System of Cultural Observatories*, in its component concerning the performing arts, and of a *National Information System on the Performing Arts*, designed to meet the knowledge needs of institutions, enterprises, and professionals in the sector. Implementation of the law is expected by the end of 2026 and

may undergo modifications compared to the original design, yet it nonetheless testifies to the interest of central institutions – and in particular of the Ministry of Culture – in this direction.

Also deserving of particular attention is the establishment of new observatories promoted by privately organized entities. Among these is the *Contemporary Art Observatory*, founded in 2023 by professionals in communication and cultural management, which analyses the international visibility of Italian contemporary art. The project developed significantly with the launch, in 2025, of a platform created with the support of the *PNRR (Next Generation EU)*, and counts among its partners the *Milan Fair* and a major banking group<sup>2</sup>. The *AGIS – Associazione Generale Italiana dello Spettacolo* which represents 13,500 enterprises in the performing arts and cinema sector, likewise activated in 2025 a *Performing Arts Observatory* in collaboration with major research organizations, the Italian Association for Cultural Economics and CLES.

Returning to regional observatories, the more structured ones – such as the *OCP* of the Piedmont Region and the *Culture and Creativity Observatory* of Emilia-Romagna – have been strengthened over time and now produce data and analyses

**The pandemic demonstrated that monitoring must go beyond purely quantitative aspects and include qualitative assessments.**

**There is now shared awareness of the need for integration and coordination among regional and national observatories, research institutes, and universities.**

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<sup>2</sup> The promoters of the project are Silvia Anna Barrilà, Franco Broccardi, Maria Adelaide Marchesoni, and Marilena Pirrelli. The platform was presented on 12 June 2025 at the Triennale di Milano.



increasingly aimed at supporting cultural policies and territorial planning. With the support of the Veneto Region, an *Observatory on Culture and Creativity* has also been activated, the result of collaboration between Ca' Foscari University, the Venice School of Management, Centro Aiku, and the IUAV University of Venice, a virtuous example of synergy between public institutions and academia.

The Italian cultural system is thus reinforcing observation tools capable of guiding strategic decisions while at the same time enhancing the sector's body of knowledge. There is now shared awareness of the need for integration and coordination among regional and national observatories, research institutes, and universities – overcoming the distinction between public and private actors – in order to obtain comparable data and analyses and to define shared strategic guidelines aimed at strengthening and enhancing the cultural system in all its complexity.

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He holds a Master's degree in Arts Management and Cultural Economics from the University of Bologna. Cultural analyst and former member of the High Council for the Performing Arts at the Italian Ministry of Culture, is currently a member of the Scientific Committee of the Symbola Foundation as well as the editorial board of the journal *Economia della Cultura*. He is an Adjunct Professor at the Department of the Arts, University of Bologna and collaborates with the National School for Cultural Heritage and Activities of the Ministry of Culture. His previous appointments include Director of the ATER Foundation and Director as well as Technical-Scientific Coordinator of the Performing Arts Observatory of the Emilia-Romagna Region, established jointly by the Region and ATER-Emilia-Romagna Theatrical Association. He is the author of numerous essays and articles on cultural policy, education, and labor within the cultural sector.



## MAPPING THE TALENT IN THE ROOM: LAUNCHING THE ENCATC COLLECTIVE MENTORING PROGRAMME



**Carla Figueira**  
*ENCATC Strategic Policy Advisor*

### From Programme Design to Living Community

In December 2025, ENCATC launched a new Collective Mentoring Programme dedicated to professionals across the cultural and creative sectors. Running until Spring 2026, the programme builds on ENCATC's long-standing commitment to peer learning, international exchange, and professional development, while drawing inspiration from the EU-funded REMAM – Reinventing Mentoring in Arts Management project.

Rather than adopting a traditional one-to-one mentoring format, this pilot edition deliberately foregrounds collective learning, positioning mentoring as a shared social practice. Participants are invited to learn with and from one another, supported by invited provocateurs and facilitated peer-circle sessions. The programme is structured around



the triple transformation shaping today's cultural and creative sectors: green, digital, and social.

This article opens ENCATC's reporting on the programme by reflecting on the kick-off meeting held on 4 December 2025, which brought together over twenty participants from across Europe and neighbouring regions. The article draws on participants' introductions, shared reflections, and biographies. What follows is not a set of individual testimonies, but a collective portrait: a mapping of the talent, experience, concerns, and aspirations present in the room, and an initial exploration of the collaborative potential emerging within this new peer community. Individual profiles are available in the programme brochure.



*Participants in the ENCATC Collective Mentoring Programme*

## **Who Is in the Room? Diversity of Profiles, Roles, and Geographies**

From the outset, the diversity of the cohort was striking. Participants come from EU Member States, accession countries, and neighbouring regions, reflecting ENCATC's broader ambition to act as a connector across different cultural policy and practice

contexts. This geographical spread is mirrored by a wide variety of professional roles and institutional settings.

The group includes:

- **Researchers and doctoral candidates** working on cultural policy, sustainability, and international cultural relations;
- **Lecturers and educators** involved in arts management, cultural policy, sustainability, and heritage studies;
- **Practitioners and managers** working in museums, arts councils, libraries, and cultural organisations;
- **Artists, writers, and translators**, often combining creative practice with policy engagement and advocacy;
- **Consultants and strategists** operating at the intersection of culture, innovation, technology, and social impact;
- **Former and current public officials**, bringing experience from ministries, local government, and EU-level policy processes.

Many participants move fluidly between sectors — academia and practice, public administration and civil society, culture and education, culture and health, culture and technology. This hybridity is not incidental: it reflects broader shifts in cultural careers and the increasing need for cross-sectoral literacy in addressing complex societal challenges.

Several participants are alumni of ENCATC Academies in Bologna or Lille, while others encountered ENCATC through different entry points. The mentoring programme thus also functions as a space for re-connecting alumni, consolidating ENCATC's role as a long-term learning ecosystem rather than a series of stand-alone events.

**Rather than adopting a traditional one-to-one mentoring format, this pilot edition deliberately foregrounds collective learning, positioning mentoring as a shared social practice.**

### **Shared Turning Points: How Practice Is Shaped by Context**

During the kick-off session, participants were invited to reflect briefly on a moment or encounter that had significantly shaped their thinking or practice in relation to resilience and transformation. Although these reflections emerged from very different contexts, several recurring themes became visible.

### **Learning Across Borders and Power Asymmetries**

For some, pivotal moments occurred through international exchanges — conferences, teaching opportunities, or collaborative projects — that exposed them to perspectives beyond dominant Western frameworks. Encounters with students, artists, or communities working under conditions of political instability or limited resources prompted deeper

reflection on issues such as youth disillusionment, cultural citizenship, and the social responsibilities of cultural policy.

These experiences highlighted the importance of *listening across* contexts and recognising uneven power relations in global cultural discourse. They also reinforced the value of ENCATC's transnational spaces as sites where such conversations can be held with care and criticality.

## **Crisis as Catalyst: War, Climate, and Social Fracture**

Other turning points were shaped by crisis conditions: armed conflict, displacement, climate emergency, or post-transition governance challenges. Participants working in or with Ukraine, the Balkans, and Southern Europe reflected on how crisis accelerates experimentation — forcing new alliances between culture, health, education, and technology.

In these accounts, resilience was not framed as individual coping alone, but as something collectively cultivated through safe spaces, cultural expression, and institutional responsibility. Culture emerged as both a site of vulnerability and a critical infrastructure for social healing.

## **From Strategy to Practice: Embedding Values Institutionally**

Several participants described moments when abstract commitments — such as cultural rights, accessibility, or sustainability — became operationalised within organisations. Examples included exhibitions prompting internal reflection on sustainable procurement, or the formal integration of cultural rights into strategic frameworks.

These moments underscored a recurring tension: the gap between policy rhetoric and day-to-day practice. They also revealed a shared concern with credibility — the need for cultural organisations to align internal operations with the values they publicly promote.

## **What Participants Hope to Gain: Learning, Connection, Collaboration**

When articulating their hopes for the mentoring programme, participants repeatedly emphasised three interlinked aspirations.

### **1. Deepening Knowledge Through Peer Exchange**

Rather than seeking prescriptive solutions, participants expressed a desire for dialogue with peers facing similar dilemmas in different contexts. Many highlighted the value of hearing how others navigate sustainability, digital transformation, or inclusion within constrained institutional environments.

The collective mentoring format was widely welcomed as an opportunity for ongoing knowledge development, complementing more formal training or academic pathways.

### **2. Building Meaningful International Connections**

Networking was framed not as transactional, but as relational. Participants spoke of wanting to build trust, mutual recognition, and long-term professional relationships — including the possibility of future collaborations, joint projects, or comparative research.

In this sense, the programme is already functioning as a community of practice, where learning is embedded in relationships rather than delivered through content alone.



### 3. Aligning Values, Strategy, and Impact

A third aspiration concerned alignment: between creative vision and measurable impact, between cultural values and institutional frameworks, and between local action and broader policy agendas. Participants working across sectors were particularly interested in tools and conversations that could help translate cultural work into language legible to funders, policymakers, and partners — without losing its intrinsic complexity.

### Early Signals of Collaborative Potential

Even at this early stage, several **cross-cutting areas of shared interest** emerged that point towards future collaboration:

- Culture and sustainability (environmental, social, and economic);
- Culture, health, and wellbeing;
- Cultural rights, accessibility, and inclusion;
- Education and capacity building for cultural professionals;
- Culture, technology, and ethical innovation;
- Culture's role in post-crisis recovery and social cohesion.

These thematic overlaps suggest that the mentoring programme is not only a learning space, but also a seedbed for collective inquiry. Peer circles, which will focus on green, digital, or social transformation, provide a structured yet flexible framework for exploring these intersections in more depth.

### ENCATC as Social Learning Convenor

The kick-off meeting reaffirmed ENCATC's distinctive role as a social learning convenor within the cultural and creative sectors. Rather than positioning itself solely as a knowledge provider, ENCATC acts as an enabler of exchange — creating the conditions for professionals to surface tacit knowledge, question assumptions, and learn across difference.

This approach aligns with ENCATC's broader strategic orientation: fostering peer learning, supporting professional resilience, and strengthening the cultural policy and management field through long-term community building. The mentoring programme exemplifies this by treating learning as a collective, situated, and relational process.

### Looking Ahead

As the programme progresses, ENCATC will continue to document and share insights emerging from peer circles and collective sessions. Future reporting will focus on concrete practices, challenges, and lessons learned across the green, digital, and social strands.

For now, this initial mapping offers a snapshot of a diverse and engaged cohort — and of the shared commitment that brings them together: a belief in culture as a critical force for resilience, transformation, and collective futures.

*This article is based on collective reflections shared during the ENCATC Mentoring Programme kick-off meeting and participants' profiles. It aims to capture emerging themes and learning potential rather than individual viewpoints.*




## CARLA FIGUEIRA

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Carla currently holds a portfolio of roles in policy advising and lecturing, including as Strategic Policy Advisor for ENCATC, the European network on Cultural Management and Cultural Policy education, and a Visiting Research and Knowledge Exchange Fellow attached to the Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, Goldsmiths, University of London. At ICCE she convened for a decade the MA in Cultural Policy, Relations and Diplomacy and the MA in Tourism and Cultural Policy.

Carla is an International Relations graduate from Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas da Universidade de Lisboa (Portugal) and she moved to London after a career in arts management in the Department of Culture of Lisbon's Local Authority. In the UK, she gained an MA in Arts Management (City University, Chevening Scholar) and a PhD in Cultural Policy and Management (City University, Praxis XXI Scholar).

She is a founding member of ICRRA, the International Cultural Relations Research Alliance, hosted by Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen and the British Council. She is a Leadership Fellow at the Sesimbra Social Learning Lab, Portugal, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, UK and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, UK.



## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT DURING THE WAR: LESSONS LEARNED FROM UKRAINE'S CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION



**Daryna Zhyvohliadova**  
*Research Collaborator at  
ENCATC and Academic Project  
Coordinator KU Leuven*

Photo: National Research and Restoration Centre of Ukraine, official Facebook page

The Lviv branch of the Center did the assessment and restoration of the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Museum of Local Lore objects, with support from the ALIPH, the Smithsonian, and Uber.



## Ukraine's Heritage at the Frontline

For more than a decade of the Russia's war against Ukraine, awareness of global challenges has led to a rethinking of the importance of cooperation in addressing issues of well-being, socio-political, and economic development. The link between effective responses to these challenges and the recognition and protection of diverse cultural expressions and the unique identity of communities became increasingly evident.

Under the harsh conditions of war, Ukraine seeks resources to balance cultural heritage protection with security measures, military strength, and socio-economic development. The protection of cultural heritage has been included in the Civil-Military Cooperation doctrine of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The state is also building a system to support national memory, Ukrainian-language cultural content, and commemorative practices. «In times of war, it is strategically important to mobilize international support for reforms, recovery, and reconstruction of Ukraine...By losing Ukraine's cultural heritage, Europe loses a part of world culture, its historical memory, heritage and cultural achievements» (Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, 2024). European and global experience in heritage preservation, together with human and material resources and technologies, is being rapidly adapted to Ukrainian realities. «Today, these collaborations have built a network of people, organizations, resources, data providers and analysts dedicated to protecting cultural heritage in Ukraine» (SCRI, n.d.).

Joint efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO), the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage (ALIPH), the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative (SCRI), the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research / United Nations Satellite Centre (UNITAR/UNOSAT), Uber Technologies, Inc. (USA), and other European regional agencies, funds, and organizations, together with their Ukrainian partners, are focused on raising the professional preparedness for crisis situations, as well as preserving and restoring Ukraine's cultural treasures (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024).

## The Centre Leading Cultural Preservation During War

Amid unprecedented threats to Ukrainian heritage, the National Research and Restoration Centre of Ukraine (NNDRCU) holds the unique role (NNDRCU, n.d.). This leading and oldest specialized state institution in restoration brings together highly qualified restorers, historians, art scholars, and specialists in chemistry, physics, and biology. They carry out practical restoration, conduct scientific and experimental research, conduct trainings.

International organizations support Centre during these challenging times. Teams of experts from Kyiv headquarters and regional offices in Kharkiv, Lviv, and Odesa, together with international partners, conduct emergency conservation, restoration, relocation, and later recovery of invaluable objects and artifacts (NNDRCU, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c). The unique mobile emergency response units - "Heritage Ambulances" - were created by the support of ALIPH (the Foundation carries out its mission thanks to the support of its nine member States, including France), with financial contribution of the European Union (EU)



and the Getty. These vehicles serve as mobile laboratories, transporting conservators, storing materials and equipment for urgent conservation, as well as relocating artifacts from dangerous areas (ALIPH Foundation, 2024). Building on this solidarity to protect collections in war zones, France and ALIPH have also supported initiatives abroad to safeguard Ukraine's most endangered masterpieces. This commitment took shape in the *Standing with Ukrainian Museums* initiative, led by the Louvre with the Khanenko National Museum of Arts in Kyiv, centered on safeguarding unique Byzantine icons (Musée du Louvre, 2023). «France supports Ukraine and remains a reliable partner in the Ukrainian people's fight for freedom as a European nation, whose culture is part of our shared European heritage. We will continue to work together to protect and preserve cultural heritage, restore Ukraine and its cultural sites, and support Ukrainian artists, museum workers, restorers, and researchers», said Rachida Dati, the Minister of Culture of France, during her meeting with the Ukrainian colleagues (MCSC, 2025).

SCRI, in cooperation with Uber, also provides transportation and accommodation for Centre staff to visit museums and storage sites across Ukraine, where they conduct monitoring, emergency evacuation, and restoration of collections (European Parliament et al., 2023, p.58; SCRI, 2023). With the support of these organizations and UNESCO's Kyiv office, regular missions to de-occupied territories have been carried out under difficult wartime conditions (Kurin, 2024; U.S. Congress, 2024). Alongside urgent restoration and conservation, the Centre provides on-site methodological support for museums and ensures the preservation of evacuated artifacts in critical condition (NNDRCU, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c).



NNDRCU preserved Banksy's graffiti "Bearded Man Taking a Bath", painted in 2022 in a war-damaged apartment in Horenka, Kyiv region.

The importance of education, training, professional development, and research is emphasized in the Strategy for the Development of Culture in Ukraine until 2030. It identifies these areas as an operational goal «for the protection, preservation, enrichment,

and use of the potential of cultural heritage and cultural values» (Government of Ukraine, 2025). Accordingly, the Centre has become not only a stronghold for the urgent rescue of Ukrainian heritage, but also a key educational, coordinating, and consulting platform.

## Building Skills for Heritage Protection

Through cooperation with international partners, a multidisciplinary knowledge exchange between heritage professionals with practical experience in emergencies is being facilitated (ICCROM, 2024; Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, 2023; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024; NNDRCU, 2023). Extensive pre-war and current experience in restoration and stabilization, combined with the integration of international standards, has raised crisis response to a new level. This knowledge is now shared both with Ukrainian specialists and with the global professional community. Annual international conferences of the NNDRCU, *“The Museum Fund of Ukraine in the Realities of War”*, foster the development of a heritage protection system in Ukraine, unite the academic and museum communities, and encourage the exchange of current expertise (NNDRCU, 2024).



*NNDRCU joined a UNESCO-funded seminar on stabilizing damaged works from the Boichuk Kyiv State Academy of Decorative and Applied Arts and Design.*

With international funding, the Centre and global experts organize online and offline training sessions, on-site workshops, and seminars in Ukraine (ACURE, 2025). Ukrainian professionals are enhancing their knowledge of preventive measures, protection, and stabilization of damaged heritage objects. They also learn about modern technologies for monitoring, conservation, and restoration, as well as global practices of emergency evacuation and response protocols (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024; NNDRCU, 2023). Conservators receive comprehensive, practice-tested methodological information

on supporting both tangible and intangible heritage during emergencies. An example is the Ukrainian translation of the UNESCO-ICCROM manual *Endangered Heritage: Emergency Evaluation of Heritage Collections* (ICCROM et al., 2022).

The work of the National Research and Restoration Centre of Ukraine, along with other Ukrainian cultural institutions and their active collaboration with international partners, demonstrates the effectiveness of joint efforts by the global professional community to safeguard Ukraine's unique culture. These efforts also lay a foundation for a shared future of peaceful coexistence. «When we lose irreplaceable history and culture, it is a profound loss to us all. If we instead work together to celebrate, share, and protect cultural heritage, we are ensuring the triumph of our humanity» (Smithsonian Institution, 2022).

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#### Publication Context and Acknowledgements

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## DARYNA ZHYVOHLIADOVA

Daryna Zhyvohliadova's is a cultural professional and academic from Ukraine with expertise in management and knowledge exchange practices for international cultural cooperation, as well as in strategies for safeguarding cultural heritage. She is currently the Academic Project Coordinator at KU Leuven for the HERitage UKRaine project within the Faculty of Arts, MoSa - History of Modernity and Society, Belgium. In 2023, she was awarded the Youth Cultural Protection Professional Award by the International Arts and Antiquities Forum, UK.

Dr Zhyvohliadova has delivered guest lectures at universities worldwide, including the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine), University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), University of Maribor (Slovenia) and University of Technology Sydney (Australia). She has served as consultant to the ALIPH Foundation, Europa Nostra and the Cultural Relations Platform; led the Creative Europe Desk; and coordinated the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) humanitarian response for youth as well as international cooperation at Ukrainian Cultural Foundation. As an individual member of ENCATC, she is a committed youth advocate and promotes culture as a cornerstone of sustainable development.



Project  
in the Spotlight

## PRESERVING THE PAST, SHAPING THE FUTURE: ECHOES – YOUR GATEWAY TO A COLLABORATIVE AND INNOVATIVE EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMUNITY

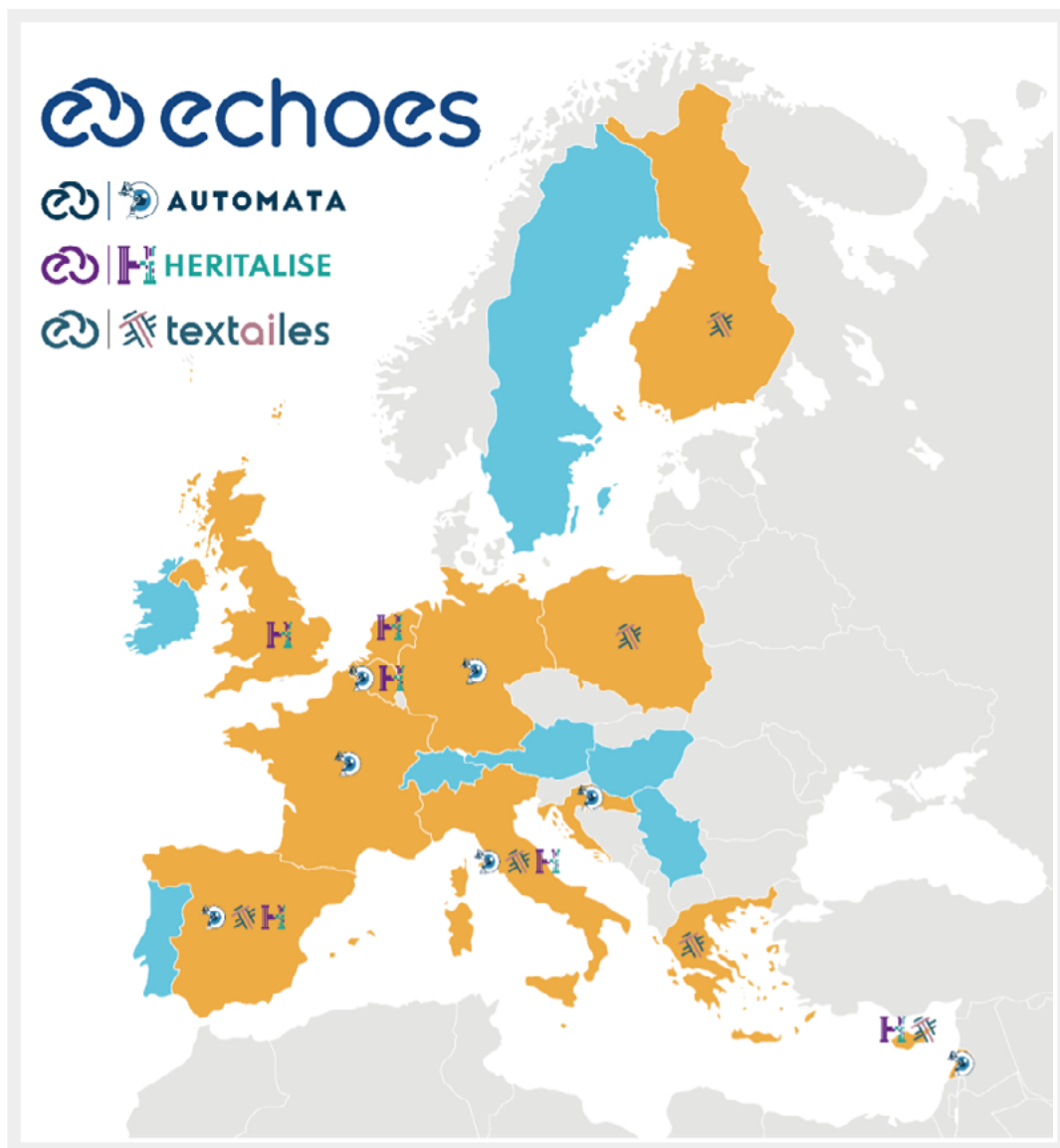


**Claudio Prandoni**

*European project expert  
and Project Manager*

The **European Cloud for Heritage OpEn Science (ECHOES)** is a major initiative funded by the **European Commission** and **UK Research and Innovation** to establish the **Cultural Heritage Cloud or European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage (ECCCH)**. Its mission is to create a shared, open, and sustainable digital infrastructure that supports the cultural heritage sector by offering access to data, scientific resources, training, and advanced digital tools.





ECHOES brings together 51 partners from 16 countries, uniting cultural heritage institutions, research organisations, and digital innovation experts into a **cohesive European community**. By fostering collaboration across fragmented sectors, the project will lay the foundation for an inclusive and innovative ecosystem that empowers professionals, researchers, and the public to interact with, enrich, and co-create knowledge around Europe's cultural heritage.

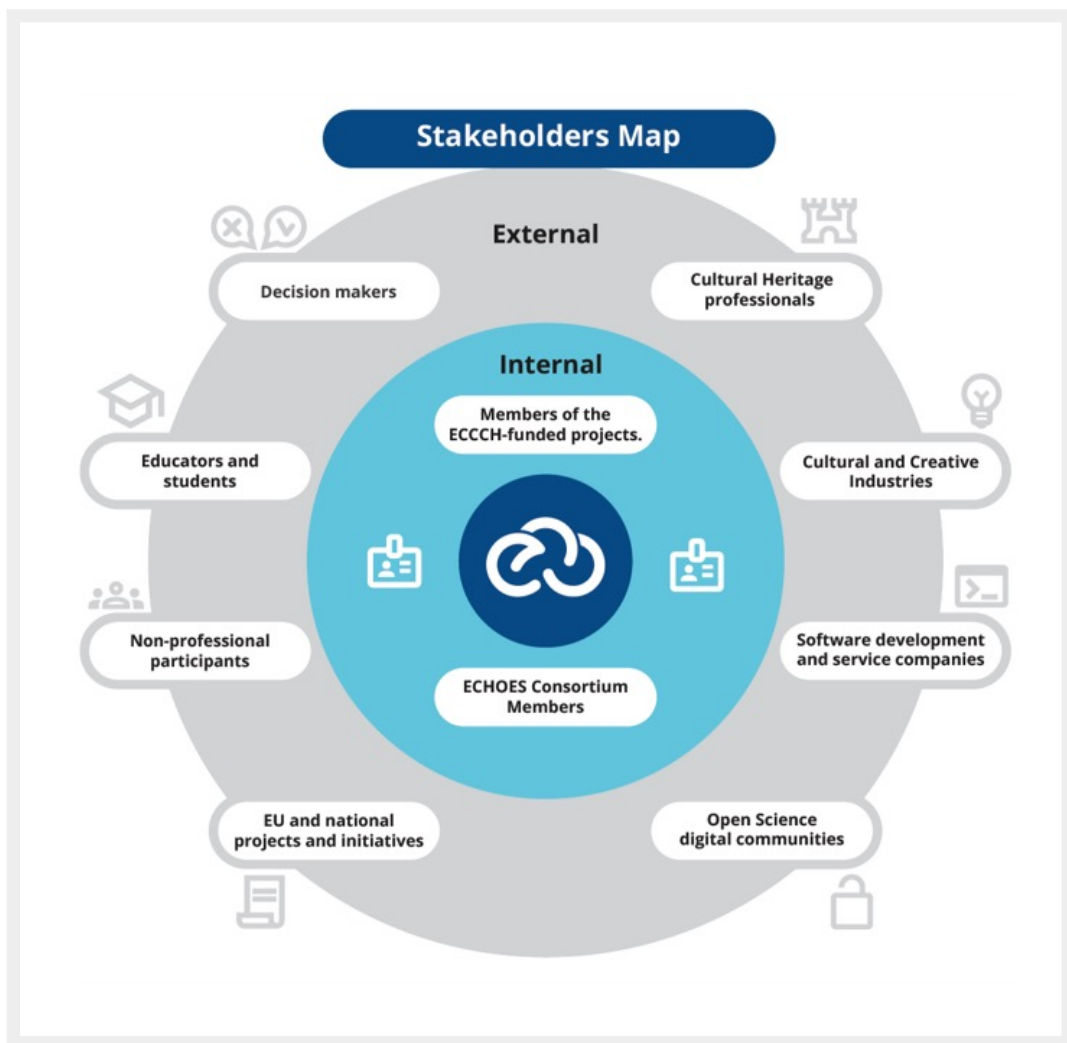
It is important to highlight that ECHOES is the project that lays the foundations of the **Cultural Heritage Cloud**, while many other initiatives funded by the European Union contribute to enriching the Cloud with new functionalities, datasets, and services. Among them, the first three projects already launched are **AUTOMATA**, **TEXTaiLES**, and **HERITALISE**. Up to **18 new projects** will follow in the coming months, providing new tools and experimenting with innovative use cases that test the services of the Cloud in real-world contexts.

**ECHOES  
brings  
together 51  
partners from  
16 countries**

## Objectives

ECHOES is guided by six core objectives:

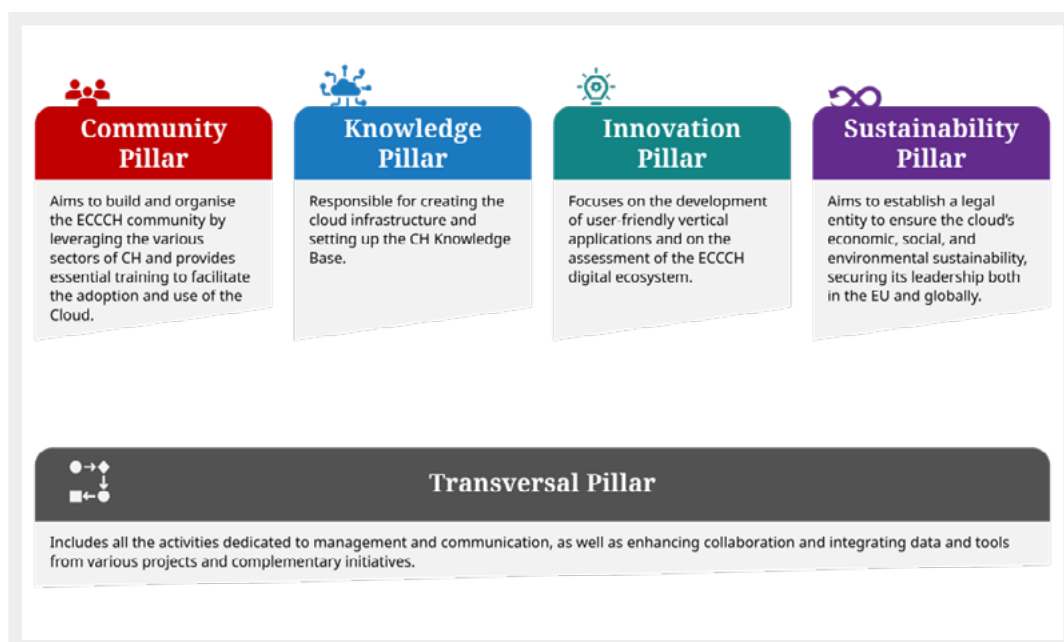
1. **Build an open-source infrastructure** enabling the development of practical applications tailored to heritage communities.
2. **Promote a holistic digital transformation** of tangible and intangible cultural assets, moving beyond purely object-based digitisation.
3. **Merge fragmented communities** of the cultural heritage field into a unified, collaborative network.
4. **Integrate past, current, and future project outcomes** (data, services, applications) within the Cultural Heritage Cloud.
5. **Ensure sustainability** by establishing a legal entity that will manage and maintain the Cloud in the long term.
6. **Foster co-creation of knowledge** through collaborative development of the **Digital Commons**, a new generation of semantically rich, collectively produced heritage resources.



## Main Activities

The project is structured around **five interconnected pillars**, which together deliver the ECCCH:

- **Community:** Building and organising the heritage community, supported by training and engagement activities to ensure adoption and inclusivity.
- **Knowledge:** Creating the core cloud infrastructure and a shared cultural heritage **Knowledge Base**.
- **Innovation:** Developing user-friendly applications and assessing the performance of the digital ecosystem.
- **Sustainability:** Establishing a legal and governance framework for the long-term resilience of the Cloud at European and global levels.
- **Transversal:** Managing communication, integration, and collaboration across projects and initiatives.



## Getting Involved

ECHOES is built on **open participation** and provides several entry points for heritage professionals, researchers, and institutions:

- **Cascading Grants Programme:** A key instrument to foster innovation is the ECHOES Cascading Grants Programme, which funds external projects that contribute new datasets, expand user communities, and develop vertical applications seamlessly integrated into the Cloud. Through successive calls (2025–2027), ECHOES will support dozens of projects across Europe, strengthening collaboration and innovation in the cultural heritage sector.
- **ECHOES Consultation:** An ongoing dialogue with diverse cultural heritage communities to map their needs and expectations for the ECCCH. While the initial survey has now closed, follow-up activities are planned to continue



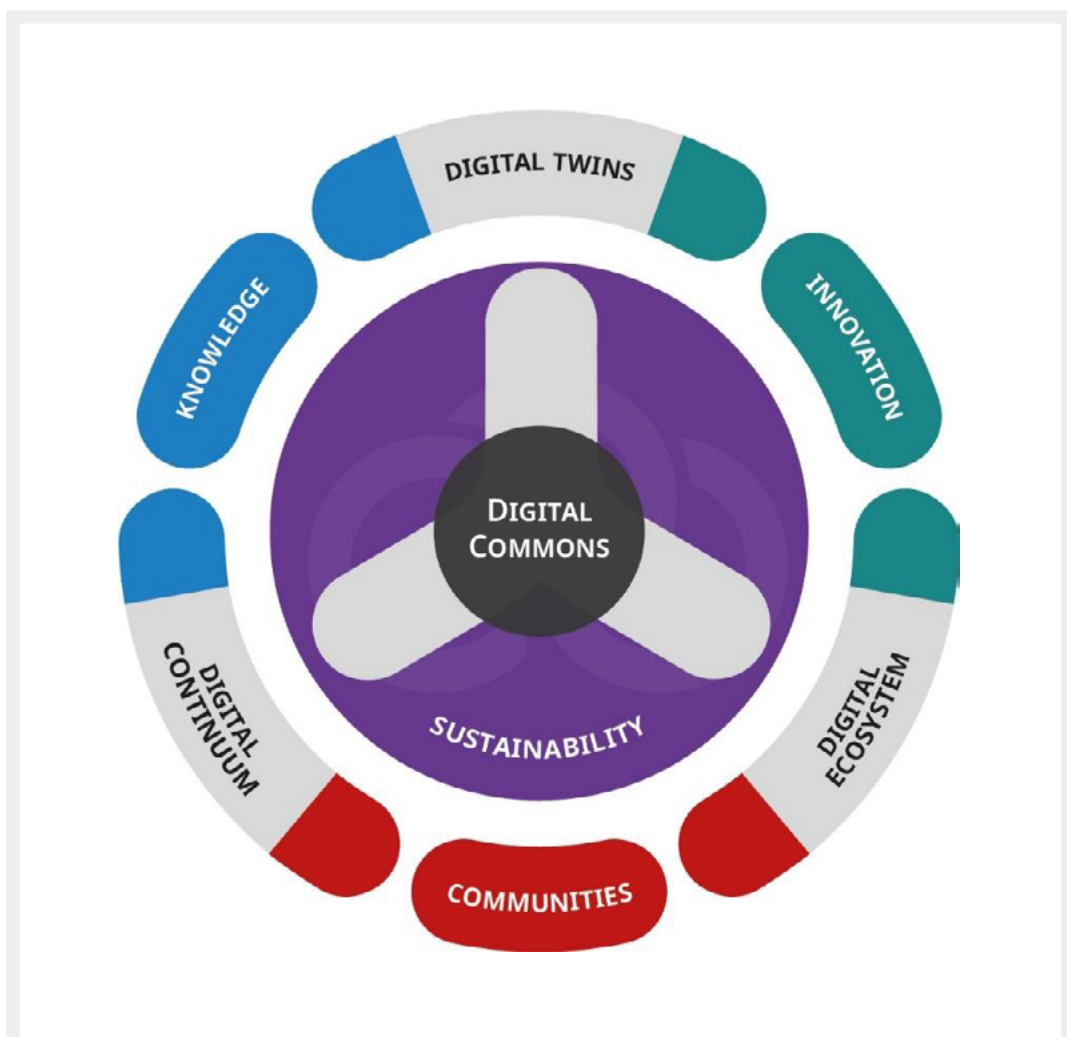
engaging stakeholders. With their contribution, the Cloud will reflect the priorities of those who will use it most.

- **Community Engagement Events and Training:** Opportunities to exchange experiences, learn new skills, and shape the collaborative environment of the Cloud.

### Key Results

ECHOES will deliver a **sustainable and inclusive Cultural Heritage Cloud** that:

- Empowers users to create, interact with, and enrich Digital Twins of cultural heritage objects and sites, enabling advanced analysis and interpretation.
- Facilitates the co-production of **Digital Commons**, semantically enriched cultural assets produced collaboratively by communities, institutions, and AI.
- Integrates results from EU and national cultural heritage projects into a unified, accessible platform.
- Provides open access to tools, datasets, and training, removing barriers for smaller and remote institutions.
- Strengthens Europe's leadership in digital heritage innovation, while fostering a global model of collaboration.



Ultimately, ECHOES aims not only to preserve the past but also to **shape the future of cultural heritage research and practice**, making knowledge more accessible, inclusive, and sustainable.

For more information: [www.echoes-eccch.eu](http://www.echoes-eccch.eu)



## CLAUDIO PRANDONI

Claudio Prandoni is an experienced European project expert and project manager with over two decades of leadership in the fields of ICT, cultural heritage, and tourism. He has coordinated numerous EU-funded initiatives, focusing on digital innovation, heritage preservation, and collaborative research. Claudio currently acts as a project manager for ARIADNE Research Infrastructure AISBL and for Consortium GARR, focusing on Horizon Europe projects such as ATRIUM, ECHOES, ARTEMIS and Skills4EOSC. He also serves as a board member of the International Digital Epigraphy Association, managing its web portal. Academically, Claudio holds a degree and a master in Applied Mathematics.



Project  
in the Spotlight

## "DATA CONVERSATIONS FOR IMPACT" TO ENHANCE THE VALUE OF THE CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES



Marzia Cerrai, Elena Coli,  
Danae Kaplanidi, Pille  
Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt

**Impact can be  
intimidating, hard  
to grasp and more  
often than not  
filled with political  
or funding-related  
expectations.**

Many Creative and Cultural organisations are in a position where they have to claim societal relevance, impact or demonstrate with measures how the things that they do make a difference. However, impact can be intimidating, hard to grasp and more often than not filled with political or funding-related expectations. To help with this, a consortium funded by Creative Europe has taken on the task to develop the ideas of Data Conversation as a way to overcome and help with some of the more challenging aspects of impact thinking.



## First results of the Data Conversations journey

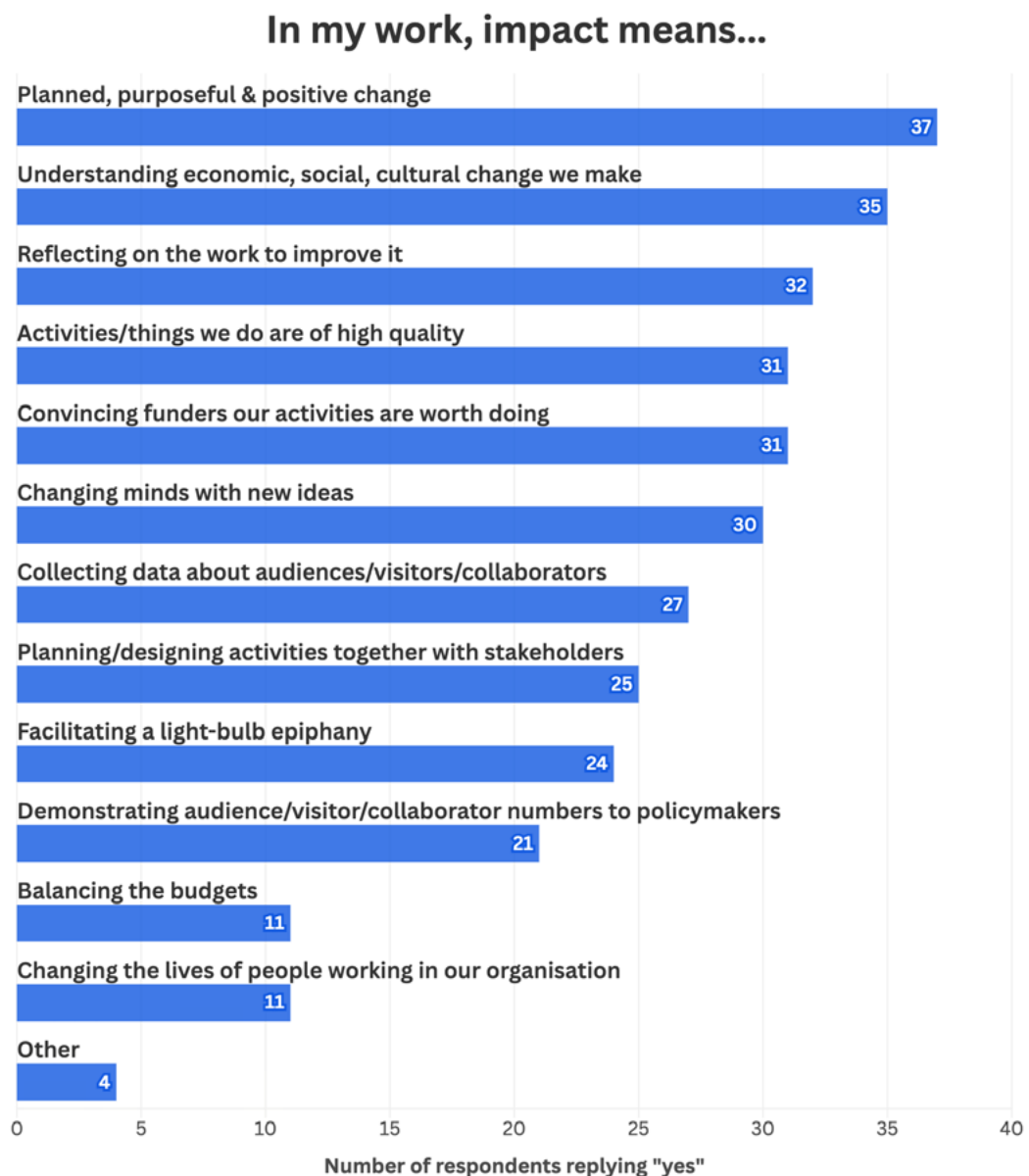
The Data Conversations project is designed as a **co-created journey with the active support of the cultural and creative sector**. To ensure the services offered are as useful and relevant as possible, the Universities of Florence and Malmö conducted an **extensive survey on the state of the art** of impact assessment within the European cultural and creative sector. Specifically, they conducted **20 interviews** with European cultural and creative organisations and collected another **64 responses** through a questionnaire.

The results of this survey, which also included a mapping activity of 29 existing impact assessment tools, reveal a multifaceted and dynamic panorama regarding "impact."

Let's look at some key findings together.

### 1. Is there one true definition of impact?

There is no single dominant definition of impact. When asked, "What impact means in the work of CCIs" a scenario emerged that covers different areas, ranging from accountability to social change:



- The primary definition is the **"planned, purposeful and positive change"** that an **organisation effects** (37 out of 64 responses).
- This is supplemented by the necessity to **"understanding the economic, social, cultural change"** generated by the organisation (35 responses)
- Another key dimension is the idea of **"changing the minds of people with new ideas"** (30 responses), which underlines the cognitive and inspirational dimension of cultural activity.

## 2. Are CCIs leveraging their impact assessment to its full potential

The survey revealed ample room for improvement regarding the conscious use of impact as a tool for internal enhancement:

### To which extent do you agree with the following statements in your line of work?



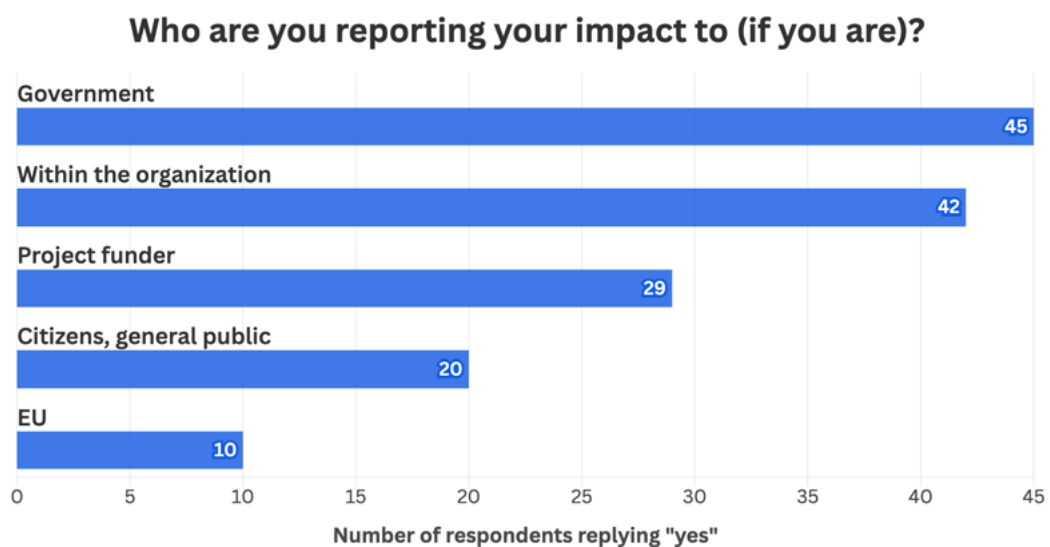
- Almost **80%** of the organisations surveyed are aware that impact analysis is **necessary to provide a better service, activity, or content**.
- The percentage of organisations that acknowledge they "**should work more with impact analysis but are not doing it at the moment**" stands at **60%**.
- The percentage of organisations that actively use impact as a **tool to guide internal development** reaches just over **43%**.

These figures indicate that, despite strong awareness of the analysis' importance, its **systematic implementation as an internal development tool remains limited**, creating a significant scope for *empowerment* action from a project like Data Conversations.

### 3. Are CCIs speaking to citizens, or just to their funders?

The other side of the coin is represented by impact as a tool for external communication. The three targets identified in the survey (**funders, government authorities, and the public**) hold equal weight for the organisations interviewed. In fact, the responses are quite aligned, and there is no reference target that is considerably more relevant than the others.

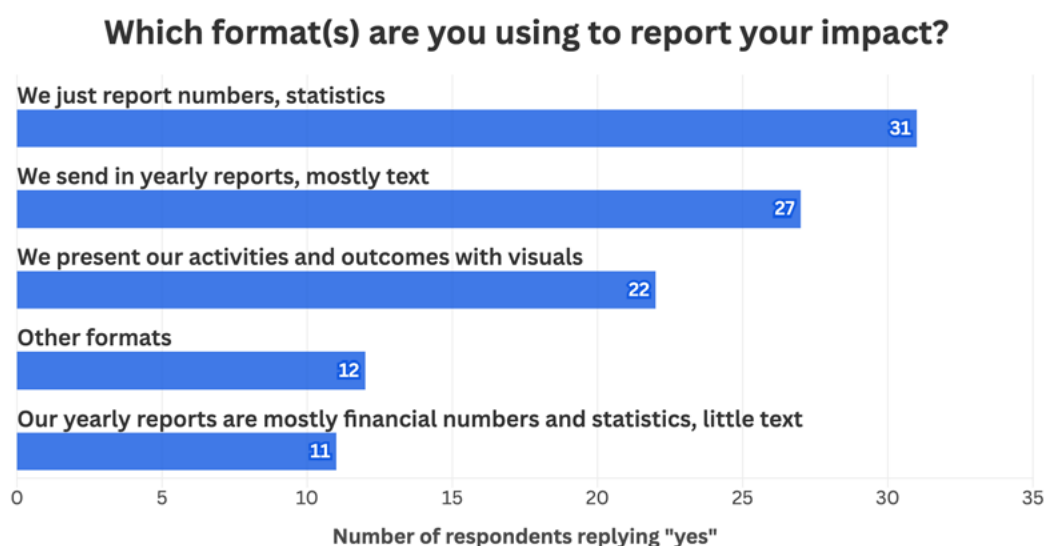
However, when explicitly answering the question, "**Who are you reporting your impact?**", the responses indicate a **clear priority towards government bodies**. The focus is concentrated on institutional or managerial targets that require accountability for sustainability or planning. Meanwhile, the **general public is the least covered area** among the relevant external targets, suggesting a gap between the perceived importance of having a social impact and the actual practice of communicating it directly to citizens.





#### 4. Is audience loyalty the singular golden indicator for non-monetary value?

More than 80% of respondents agree that the impact measures for cultural and creative organisations must also be **non-monetary**, and there is a clear desire within organisations to move beyond solely financial indicators.



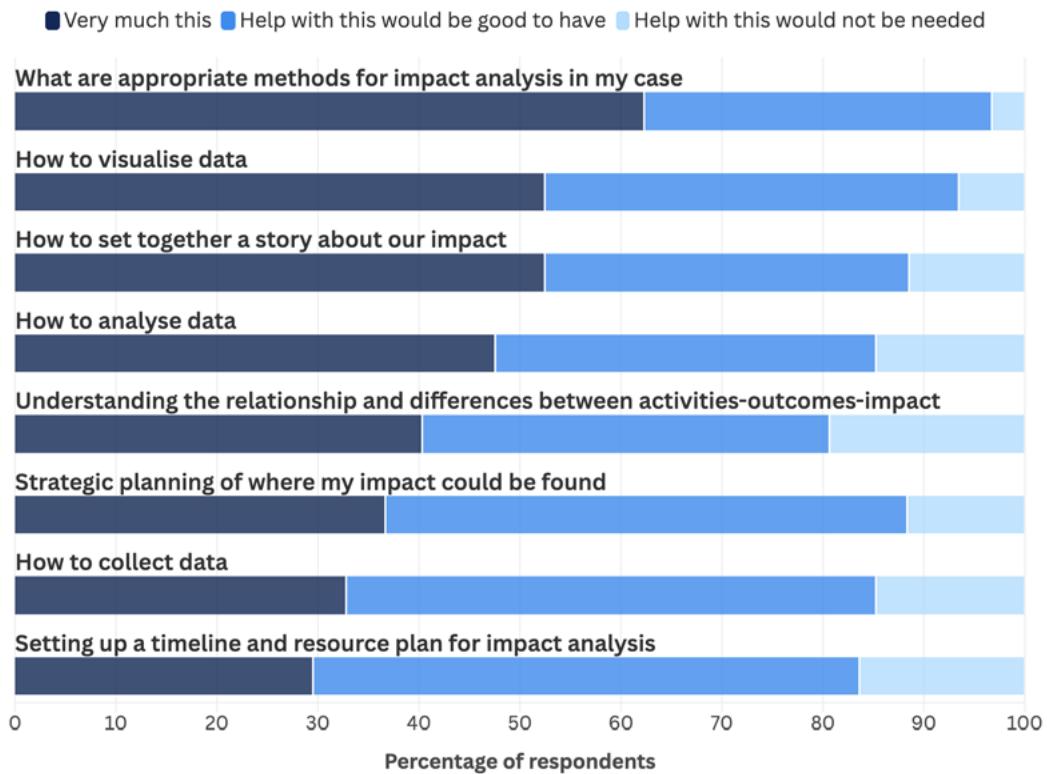
The importance of balanced budgets is not ignored, but the participants expressed an overwhelming conviction regarding the need to demonstrate **non-monetary value**. Nevertheless, there is a debate internal to CCIs about which non-monetary measures are the most appropriate, with audience loyalty (**returning visitors**) being considered a key measure by many, though not the only sufficient one.

While a single impact-indicator might be desirable for its simplicity, it is also clear that organisations value diversity of measures and measuring approaches as there is an agreement that no singular "golden indicator" exists that captures the diversity and richness of the impact that cultural and creative industries can have.

#### 5. What are the challenges holding CCIs back from effective data use?

Organisations also identified the main obstacles to impact analysis, which stem from a combination of **time/priority** and **resource constraints** (financial and expertise).

## If there were a digital impact tool for cultural and creative industries, what aspects of impact work would you need help with?



At the same time, there is a **lack of clarity** regarding what audience data organisations actually possess. Simply **having the data is not always enough**: organisations that report having data may still **lack the necessary tools, capacity, or confidence** to effectively analyse and interpret it for audience understanding.

### A Case Study: Fondazione Sistema Toscana

Fondazione Sistema Toscana (FST) is the coordinating partner for the **Data Conversations project**. Its participation stems from a strong interest in the theme of impact as FST works closely with the Regional Government in implementing territorial activities to realise regional policies.

Among FST's main activities is the **Internet Festival**, a four-day event dedicated to digital innovation. The Festival, whose promoters include major training and research institutions (the University of Pisa, CNR, Scuola Normale Superiore, and Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna), has always aimed to **disseminate the culture of innovation** at various levels and to diverse audiences.

Every year, the Internet Festival questions **how to capture the change it aims to achieve**, what **impact it actually manages to create**, and how to **balance its stated goals with actual outcomes**. FST asks itself: are the numbers of people involved enough? What additional elements can consolidate the Festival's positioning? What is the measurable perspective, and over what timeframe?

Participation in the Data Conversations project allows FST to focus on the theme of impact and apply the lessons learned and tools acquired within the framework of the Internet Festival, as well as to add these principles to its other activities. FST's value resides not only in the ability to implement regional directives but also in the **capacity to identify the most effective, high-quality, and sustainable strategies** for enacting regional policies.

## Data collection on youth expectations for INTERNET FESTIVAL 2025

Stimulated by its participation in the **Data Conversations** project, FST implemented a targeted data collection activity during the 2025 edition of **Internet Festival**. This initiative focused on the young public attending the workshops and labs on digital innovation.

The objective was twofold:

- To understand in advance the **expectations** of the young participants regarding the Festival.
- To evaluate the **satisfaction level** of the activities carried out.

### Pre-Festival phase: gauging expectations

To capture initial expectations, in the days leading up to the event, FST invited participants to submit a brief sentence in response to the question: "**What would you like to find at the Internet Festival 2025?**"

The analysis of the responses revealed a strong interest in **robotics** and **Artificial Intelligence**. Crucially, a clear demand emerged for **practical experiences**, demonstrations, and concrete applications of technologies at the festival, rather than traditional frontal lectures.

This exercise was a way to **define a boundary around the meaning of impact** with the direct help of the students attending the festival, whom the festival usually does not reach easily. What is the **value they expect** to receive from the festival? What **can the festival do to meet these expectations**, and how should it select which "wishes" to respond to?

However, the data collected from the audience poses a critical challenge: how can these qualitative and often diverse insights be systematised and transformed into a practical organisational tool for improving and better structuring the activities? Which patterns can the festival identify, which ones are useful to it, and which should it discard?

These are not simple questions, and it will be necessary to answer them to be able to calibrate the activities for the next edition, maintaining the necessary balance between public requests, the needs of promoting partners, and the cultural mission of the festival.

What is important to stress is that the analysis of this type of results cannot be an individual effort carried out by a single person. Instead, it must be a collective process among members of the festival's organisation, where each person brings a different point of view, thus enriching the perspectives of the others.



## Post-Activity phase: measuring satisfaction

The final data collection, conducted after the activities, was carried out in a completely analog manner to foster engagement. FST set up a large panel (2x3 meters) and asked the young attendees to select a colored Post-it, with each color representing a specific level of satisfaction:

- Red: They would never want to return to the festival.
- Orange: They were bored.
- Yellow: They needed to think about it.
- Green: They were tired but happy.
- Blue: They went home full of new ideas.

After choosing a color, each participant was asked to place their Post-it in the appropriate quadrant:

- The X-axis (horizontal) identified the school they attended.
- The Y-axis (vertical) identified their relationship with technology, spanning from "completely uninterested in technology" to "passionate about technology."

Using this ingenious method, FST was able to collect more than a **thousand responses** over the four-day event, obtaining a detailed map of satisfaction crossed with the participants' educational background and interest in technology.

This data gathering activity took the form of **collective gamification**, bringing in the student community, one of the festival's key audiences. This approach actively positioned them in a **dual role**: not only as the **providers of raw data**, but also as the **immediate beneficiaries and recipients of the visualised insights**.



Data collection at the Internet Festival 2025. Photo by Fondazione Sistema Toscana

## Methodological notes and critical issues: the role of facilitation

A gamified data collection experience like this generally requires **active facilitation**. The presence of a person who invites participants to respond and clearly explains the mechanism is essential (the "game" must be as simple as possible, even at the cost of forgoing some additional information).

The presence of a facilitator, however, while encouraging participation, impacts the **"sincerity"** of the response. To encourage the young people to feel free to choose colors associated with a negative experience (Red and Orange), FST chose to place some **fictitious red and orange Post-its** on the panel before the activities began, thereby normalising the expression of low satisfaction.

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the **group effect (or group bias)**: especially with younger children, but not exclusively, there is a tendency where a leader dictates the line of response and other participants tend to follow. This bias is intrinsic to collective games of this type and must always be taken into account in the final data analysis.

More development work is needed to figure out how to maximise the knowledge gained from this gamified data-collection activity.

## Data Conversations for Impact - what can a EU project do to help

"Data Conversations for Impact" is a project co-funded by the European Union's Creative Europe programme which aims to enhance **the social and economic impact of the Cultural and Creative Industries** by addressing key challenges: **impact design, data literacy, data collection, digitalization, and the adoption of Artificial Intelligence**.

The project involves diverse organisations long committed to the theme of impact: **research institutions** like the Universities of Florence and Malmö; **cultural and creative sector organisations** including the Estonian National Museum, Domestic Data Streamers, Europeana Foundation and Fondazione Sistema Toscana; and a **technology sector company**, IN2 Digital Innovations GmbH. The consortium also includes two strategic associated partners, representing international networks of CCIs: ENCATC and Creative Business Network.

## Development of the Didact Digital Tool

To help CCIs fully leverage their value, the consortium is currently developing a **digital tool for impact design and assessment**, building on successful frameworks such as the *MeMind Impact Canvas*<sup>1</sup>, the *Europeana Impact Playbook*<sup>2</sup>, and the *Museums of Impact*<sup>3</sup> self-evaluation. The first version of the tool will be released in **2026**. This will be followed by a series of **testing activities** open to cultural and creative organisations, whose feedback will guide the definition of the tool's final functionalities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.memind.eu/impact-canvas-en/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pro.europeana.eu/page/europeana-impact-playbook>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.museumsofimpact.eu/en/museums-of-impact>

## Art and Research Residency

Also in 2026, the project will organise a one-week **art and research residency** for creative sector professionals. 10 professionals will be selected through a European call, which will be launched between May and June 2026. They will participate in a co-creative activity focused on **prototyping innovative tools for audience data collection** where, under the guidance of the consortium, the professionals will be asked to reflect on the most effective and engaging ways to stimulate a data-driven "conversation" with the public of cultural activities.

## Conclusion: key insights and get involved

The preliminary work done so far highlights two key areas: the demand for practical, everyday tools for impact measurement, and the persistent challenge of data literacy within the cultural and creative sector. The development of the DiDaCT digital tool and co-creative residencies want to directly address these needs.

### GET INVOLVED:

*If you are a CCI interested in testing the DiDaCT digital tool when it is ready, please contact the project team at [info@dataconversations.eu](mailto:info@dataconversations.eu)*

*Follow our progress and learn more about the project activities on the website: <https://dataconversations.eu>*



MARZIA  
CERRAI

Marzia Cerrai ([m.cerrai@fst.it](mailto:m.cerrai@fst.it)), PhD (Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa), has a multidisciplinary background blending humanities, philology, and IT. Since January 2017, she has been a project manager at Fondazione Sistema Toscana, specialising in shaping and managing cutting-edge cultural, creative, and digital innovation projects for national and European programs (e.g., Horizon2020, Creative Europe). She also handles project communication and dissemination. She recently co-curated the "Genio Toscano" exhibition (featured in San Francisco 2024 and Osaka Expo 2025) which showcases the region's manufacturing, design, and innovation heritage.





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Danae Kaplanidi ([danae.kaplanidi@gmail.com](mailto:danae.kaplanidi@gmail.com)) is a socio-cultural anthropologist working as a consultant. She has studied Cultural Technology and Communication (BA) and Cultural and Social Anthropology (MA). Her research interests include environmental anthropology, heritage, crafts, food, and impact assessment. She collaborates with the Europeana Foundation and the Piraeus Cultural Foundation in the framework of European projects. Last, she cooperates voluntarily with the Pomak female social enterprise "To Pleteno"



## PILLE PRUULMANN- VENGERFELDT

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt ([pille.pruulmann.vengerfeldt@mau.se](mailto:pille.pruulmann.vengerfeldt@mau.se)), a member of Academia Europaea, is a professor in media and communication at Malmö University. Her research takes a critical, creative and action-oriented approach. She examines how digital technologies and their impact on our everyday lives are co-created across cultural, professional, and interpersonal contexts, and how we can best understand and narrate the impact of cultural and creative organisations. She experiments with creative research methods and outputs, including employing monsters and methods, and communicating research results with visuals. She is the president of the European Communication Research and Education Association ECREA.



*Gallery of Expo 2025 Osaka Pavilion null<sup>2</sup>*

## THE MIRROR OF DREAMS: CRAFTING NATIONAL FUTURES AT THE 2025 OSAKA WORLD EXPO



**Natalia Grincheva**  
*ENCATC correspondent  
from Osaka*

**Each national pavilion  
became a crucible  
where a country's past  
and present realities  
were forged into a  
marketable vision of  
the future.**

World Expos have long been stages for global aspiration, but the 2025 Osaka Expo, set on the symbolic "Island of Dreams" (Yumeshima), revealed itself as a critical arena for a more profound contest: the negotiation of national identity itself. Under the theme "Designing Future Society for Our Lives," the event presented itself as a collaborative platform to address humanity's pressing challenges (Expo 2025a). Yet, beneath this utopian veneer, a more complex and strategic performance was underway.



Each national pavilion became a crucible where a country's past and present realities were forged into a marketable vision of the future. This was not merely an exhibition of technological prowess; it was a global dialectic on how nations dream, and more importantly, how they sell those dreams to the world.

This process aligns with Simon Anholt's (2007) concept of "competitive identity," where a nation's reputation is built not on advertising, but on the substantive alignment of its policies, culture, and actions. The pavilions at Osaka were the physical manifestations of this struggle. They were not just displays; they were arguments, each attempting to resolve a core tension within its national narrative. This article decodes these arguments by exploring three central dialectics that defined the Expo.

**This was not merely an exhibition of technological prowess; it was a global dialectic on how nations dream, and more importantly, how they sell those dreams to the world.**



Entrance to the 2025 World Expo (East Gate) in Osaka, Japan. © Photo by Natalia Grincheva

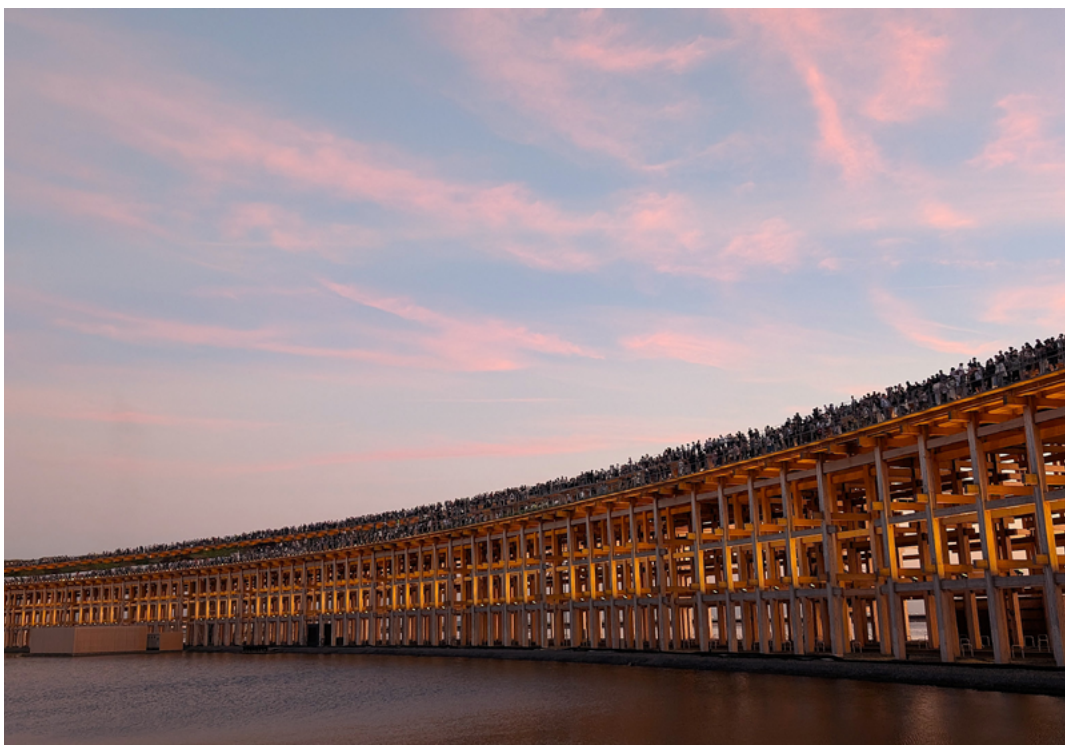
**The Expo emerges not as a simple mirror reflecting national brands, but as a dreaming glass—a lens that refracts, distorts, and exposes how nations use their histories and confront or mask their realities to script their place in the global future.**

First, it examines the dialectics of cultural capital, contrasting France's leveraging of its established luxury craftsmanship and heritage with Singapore's co-creation of a futuristic, shared identity. Second, the article analyzes the dialectics of global power, where China's projection of authority, rooted in ancient civilization, stood against the USA's vision of a frontier beyond the planet. Finally, this work investigates the dialectics of future-making governance, exploring the UAE's techno-solutionism model versus Indonesia's performative people-centric approach.

Through this framework, the Expo emerges not as a simple mirror reflecting national brands, but as a dreaming glass—a lens that refracts, distorts, and exposes how nations use their histories and confront or mask their realities to script their place in the global future.

### **The Dialectic of Legacy: Curated Heritage vs Forged Futurity**

A central tension at the Expo was defined by how nations leverage their historical and economic realities to project their future. This created a stark dialectic between nations selling a polished, inherited dream and those forging a collaborative, future-oriented one, perfectly illustrated by the pavilions of France and Singapore.



*The Grand Ring, the symbol of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan based on the concept of "Unity in Diversity." © Photo by Natalia Grincheva.*



The French Pavilion, "A Hymn to Love," was a masterclass in leveraging established cultural capital in a time of contemporary economic uncertainty. Facing domestic pressures (OECD 2025), the French government's strategy relied heavily on the financial power and global reach of its luxury conglomerates, like LVMH. The pavilion was less a government-led presentation and more a grand showroom for corporate sponsors like Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Moët Hennessy (Expo 2025b). This alliance highlighted a pragmatic truth: in a competitive global landscape, even a nation with centuries of cultural soft power requires corporate backing to project its image. France did not need to invent a new narrative; it presented itself as a timeless, finished product of high esthetics, sophistication and taste, a dream of heritage craftsmanship available for purchase. This was nation branding as a strategic maneuver, using the undeniable strength of its luxury heritage assets to counterbalance less glamorous economic headlines.



Corporate Sponsors of the French Pavilion. © Photo by Natalia Grincheva.

In direct opposition, the Singapore Pavilion embodied the strategy of an economic powerhouse grappling with its youth as nation on the global stage. Despite boasting one of the highest GDP per capita in the world and once described as a postcolonial "economic miracle" (Barr and Skrbiš 2011) in the Southeast Asia, the nation-state lacks the deep historical tapestry that confers longstanding global legitimacy. Consequently, the Singaporean government invested significantly not in showcasing finished products, but in orchestrating an experience of co-creation. Its pavilion guided visitors to a "Dream Sphere," inviting them to contribute their own visions for the future (Expo 2025c.). This was a brilliant, forward-looking strategy. By making every visitor a stakeholder, Singapore sold the process of building a harmonious tomorrow, positioning itself not as a relic of the past, but as the sophisticated, neutral host for the world's collective aspiration. Where France sold a dream of beauty and love, curated by its corporate champions, Singapore government invested in a dream authored by its global audience, building its brand in real-time through shared participation.



Singapore Pavilion: "Dream Spehere". © Photo by Natalia Grincheva.

## The Dialectic of Power: Civilizational Restoration vs Frontier Disruption

The most geopolitically charged contest at the Expo was between the established and rising superpowers, whose pavilions presented two irreconcilable claims to twenty-first-century leadership. In a world shifting toward multipolarity, China and the United States did not merely display technologies of the future; they enacted a profound ideological struggle over the very source of global authority.

The China Pavilion, the largest in Expo history, was a monumental assertion of its economic and military rise. Its grandeur, however, was meticulously framed not as a new phenomenon, but as the restoration of a natural, millennia-old order. The pavilion's centerpiece—a replica of a 5,000-year-old Bronze Sacred Tree, digitally reimaged to bloom with futuristic light—sent an unambiguous message: China's cutting-edge advancements in AI, green tech, and infrastructure are not a break from tradition, but the latest flowering of its 5,000-year continuous civilization (Expo 2025d). This strategy leverages what Dinnie (2022) identifies as "narrative identity," crafting a brand story where modernity is legitimized by ancient depth. By rooting its futuristic vision in an unassailable historical narrative, China presented its ascent not as a disruption, but as a return to its rightful, preordained place at the center of the world stage.

In stark contrast, the USA Pavilion presented a vision of authority that deliberately transcends its complex and divisive domestic realities. Sidestepping any reference to a new administration or internal political friction (Kleinfeld 2023), it retreated to the safer, more aspirational territory of the "American Dream." Its pavilion, characterized by sharp, geometric architecture, focused relentlessly on the next frontier: space exploration and creative entrepreneurship (Expo 2025e). This was a narrative of perpetual, forward-oriented disruption, embodying the pioneering spirit that has long defined the nation's brand. By focusing on a future "beyond the planetary" (Siddiqi 2018), the U.S. reframed the competition. It was no longer about a contest on Earth, but about who would lead humanity's next great leap. This strategy asserted that American global leadership is not dependent on current political cycles, but is an inherent, enduring capacity to reinvent and conquer new realms, ensuring it still rules the world of tomorrow.



## The Dialectic of Sustainability: Techno-Solutionism vs Human-Centric Harmony

The global imperative of sustainability, now a central tenet of World Expos (Ballester 2022), revealed a final, critical dialectic in national branding strategies. This tension pivots on a fundamental question: is our planetary future secured through high-tech innovation or through a return to human-scale, cultural wisdom? The pavilions of the UAE and Indonesia embodied this clash, presenting two opposing visions for a sustainable tomorrow.

The UAE Pavilion engaged in a powerful act of strategic transformation. As a nation whose identity and wealth are inextricably linked to fossil fuels, its pavilion was a direct rebuttal to its “rentier state” stereotype. It showcased a vision of a circular bio-economy, transforming its own agricultural byproducts—such as date palm waste into building materials—into a narrative of sophisticated, resource-optimizing innovation (Expo 2025f). This was not a display that hid its past, but one that actively sought to publicly transcend it. The UAE projected a brand of economic intelligence and logistical mastery, positioning itself not merely as a consumer of global technology, but as a savvy, self-reinventing innovator leveraging its capital to build a profitable, post-oil future (ME UAE 2025). This techno-solutionist model argues that sustainability is an engineering challenge, best solved through investment, innovation, and intelligent management.



UAE Pavilion: "Earth to Ether". © Photo by Natalia Grincheva.

In stark contrast, the Indonesia Pavilion, "Thriving in Harmony," presented a human-centric alternative (Expo 2025g). Drawing on its rich history and cultural diversity, it offered sustainability not as a technological fix, but as a state of being rooted in the philosophical framework of Tri Hita Karana, which emphasizes harmony with the spiritual, social, and natural worlds. However, this carefully curated image of domestic bliss was profoundly undermined by a starkly different reality unfolding concurrently. From late August into September 2025, Indonesia was gripped by nationwide civil unrest, with protesters incited by economic and political frustration under the leadership of current administration (Magramo 2025). This glaring disconnect revealed the pavilion's "harmony" as a performative facade. The protests over economic injustice and political corruption exposed the deep socio-political fractures that the brand narrative sought to conceal, turning the pavilion's human-centric dream into a classic example of "reputation laundering," where the projected brand becomes unmoored from a less flattering, but more truthful, national reality.



*Inside the Indonesia Pavilion. Hallway with Portraits. © Photo by Natalia Grincheva.*

The 2025 World Expo in Osaka demonstrated that the "future" is not a unified destination but a contested narrative space. The pavilions collectively revealed that nation branding is a dialectical process of negotiation, where dreams of tomorrow are strategically crafted to resolve the anxieties of yesterday and today. Whether leveraging deep heritage, orchestrating collaborative creation, projecting civilizational permanence, or championing technological reinvention, each national performance was an attempt to bridge the gap between a complex reality and an aspirational identity. The Expo, therefore, served not as a simple showcase of innovation, but as a grand theatre of strategic aspiration, where the most compelling national brand was not the one with the most dazzling technology, but the one that most convincingly managed the tensions between its past, its present, and its promised future.



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## NATALIA GRINCHEVA

Dr Natalia Grincheva is a Program Leader in Arts Management at LASALLE, University of Arts Singapore, and Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne. She is an internationally recognized expert in innovative forms and global trends in contemporary museology, digital diplomacy and international cultural relations. She is the author of three monographs *Geopolitics of Digital Heritage* (Cambridge University Press: 2024), *Museum Diplomacy in the Digital Age* (Routledge: 2020) and *Global Trends in Museum Diplomacy* (Routledge: 2019). Now she is working on a new monograph, *Digital Soft Power of Heritage Media*, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press. She is also a conceptual designer of the [Data To Power](#) application, developed for academic inductive research to facilitate the exploration of complex global phenomena through data visualization, mapping, and interactive data storytelling. Dr Grincheva's professional engagements include her dedicated work for the International Fund for Cultural Diversity at UNESCO (2011) and International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (2011–2015), her research placement at ACMI X at the Australian Center for the Moving Image (2017–2019) as well as service for the Cultural Research Network (CRN) (2018–2020) and the International Cultural Relations Research Alliance (since 2020).



*On stage, Dawn Lio (Pexels)*

## PASSION IS NOT ENOUGH: TOWARDS SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP



**Laura Päiviö-Häkämies**  
*Principal Lecturer, HUMAK  
University of Applied Sciences*

When a talented young curator becomes a team leader, or when a brilliant event producer is promoted to manage an entire department, what happens in the workplace? Too often, we expect people to instantly know how to lead with no proper mentorship—just passion for the arts and the assumption that expertise in one's field automatically translates to management competence.



Recent research from HUMAK University of Applied Sciences (Finland) reveals just how problematic this assumption still is. Master's graduates **Marika Häkkinen** and **Melissa Heininen** have conducted comprehensive research that exposes systemic issues likely extending even beyond national borders. Their Master's thesis "**Towards Socially Sustainable Leadership: Leadership Culture in Cultural and Event Management and Its Development Towards Social Sustainability**," commissioned by TAKU ry (Trade Union for Art and Culture Professionals in Finland), reveals critical gaps in leadership preparation and organizational support across the cultural sector.



*hdBernd, unsplash*

As supervisor of this research—which has sparked considerable dialogue and led to numerous discussion forums across the sector—I was involved in publishing a blog series (in Finnish) on the theme with Marika Häkkinen. Discussions have already taken place within TAKU, and we wanted to continue the conversation more broadly within the ENCATC community. We believe these findings have clear implications beyond Finland, especially as European organizations increasingly focus on ESG compliance.

In their findings, 41 % of managers in supervisory roles in the cultural sector had no formal leadership training. Seventy percent received no orientation to supervisory work from their organizations. The biggest challenge, identified by 73 % of respondents, was rush and workload relative to resources—a problem that cascades into multiple other leadership failures.

But the research also uncovered a desire to do better: a growing recognition that passion for the arts can no longer be used as an excuse to exploit workers' physical or psychological stamina. A generational shift is underway, challenging decades-old assumptions about what it means to work in the cultural sector.

The study aimed to identify factors hindering socially sustainable leadership and to determine how the industry's leadership culture could be developed toward greater social sustainability. Through an online survey and thematic interviews, the research examined experiences of individuals holding managerial positions in the cultural and event sector in Finland.

To understand what these findings mean in practice and what hope exists for change, I sat down with Marika Häkkinen, who brings ten years of experience in the cultural and event sector to this crucial research.



# INTERVIEW WITH CULTURAL PRODUCER MARIKA HÄKKILÄ



**Marika Häkkilä** co-authored the research on leadership challenges in the cultural sector. She holds a Master's degree in cultural production and is dedicated to promoting social sustainability in creative industries. During her ten-year career as a producer, she has worked in the event and media sectors, examining leadership culture from both employee and supervisor perspectives.

**Laura Päiviö-Häkämies (LPH):** Marika, you and Melissa conducted this research together. What inspired you both to investigate this topic?

**Marika Häkkilä (MH):** After working in the cultural and event sector for ten years, I'd seen patterns that troubled me. I witnessed talented specialists suddenly promoted into management positions without any real preparation. I saw passionate professionals burning out because of impossible workloads. When Melissa and I began our Master's research, we wanted to understand whether these were isolated incidents or systemic problems. The research, commissioned by TAKU—the Trade Union for Art and Culture Professionals in Finland—confirmed our suspicions: these issues are deeply structural. But problems can and should be solved for a better future.

**LPH:** As your thesis supervisor, I found one statistic particularly sad: 41 % of managers in supervisory roles had no formal leadership training. Can you tell us more about what this means in practice?

**MH:** It's a pattern we see repeatedly across creative industries. People excel in their artistic or technical roles—perhaps as a curator, event producer, or artistic director—and then they're promoted to manage teams. Suddenly they're responsible for huge budgets, employment contracts, and staff wellbeing, at the same time as being responsible for the content.

**LPH:** That resonates with my own experience across various leadership roles in the cultural sector since 1998. I've seen incredibly talented professionals struggle not because they lack dedication, but because they were never given the tools to succeed as leaders. This research is particularly timely as cultural organizations across Europe are increasingly expected to meet ESG requirements—Environmental, Social, and Governance criteria. The 'S' in ESG, social sustainability, is precisely what your research addresses. How do you see this connection?

**MH:** Absolutely. ESG frameworks are becoming standard across industries, including the cultural sector. While we've made progress on environmental sustainability—thinking about carbon footprints of events, sustainable production practices—the social dimension has received less systematic attention.

Social sustainability in ESG encompasses fair labor practices, employee wellbeing, safe working conditions, diversity and inclusion, and ethical leadership. Our research reveals that the cultural sector is struggling significantly with these aspects. When 73 % of managers report unsustainable workloads, when 70 % receive no leadership orientation, when 26 % don't know employment legislation as well as they should—these aren't just individual problems. These are ESG compliance issues that affect the sector's credibility and sustainability.

**LPH:** Exactly. Cultural organizations can no longer ignore the social pillar of sustainability while celebrating their artistic achievements. What did you identify as the biggest challenge facing these managers?

**MH:** Rush and workload relative to resources—73.8 % of survey respondents identified this as their primary challenge. But here's what was truly eye-opening for me during our analysis: rush and work fragmentation form the root cause of many other leadership problems. It creates a cascading effect throughout the organization.

**LPH:** Can you explain what you mean by this "cascading effect"?

**MH:** When managers are constantly rushing from one urgent task to another, several things happen simultaneously. First, time pressures prevent them from being present for their team members—34 % of respondents reported this. Second, the managers' own wellbeing suffers—31 % mentioned this specifically.

But perhaps most importantly, despite having good intentions toward human-centered and participatory leadership, the constant rush prevents them from implementing socially sustainable management practices. You can't have meaningful one-on-ones with your team when you're firefighting. You can't provide thoughtful feedback when you're drowning in urgent emails. You can't build organizational culture when you barely have time to breathe.

**LPH:** What other systemic issues did you uncover?

**MH:** Legal knowledge gaps emerged as a significant concern. Twenty-six percent of respondents identified lack of understanding of employment legislation as a major challenge. This is troubling because it means cultural organizations may fail to comply with labor laws.

**LPH:** That's a serious issue with real consequences for employees. What role do organizations themselves play in perpetuating these problems?

**MH:** This was perhaps the most troubling finding: 70 % of survey respondents had received no orientation to supervisory work from their organizations. Think about that—seven out of ten new managers were essentially thrown into the deep end without a life jacket.

Clear job descriptions, defined areas of responsibility, and explicit goals were often absent. New managers were left isolated and unprepared, expected to somehow figure it out on their own while managing teams and delivering artistic programming.

**LPH:** Yet despite these sobering findings, you also discovered signs of positive change. What gives you hope?

**MH:** Yes! There's been a significant shift in conversations around work culture in recent years. The cultural sector has historically relied on people's passion for the arts as justification for poor working conditions, low pay, and unrealistic expectations. That



*The cultural sector needs systematic changes to support sustainable leadership practices, not stress.  
Photo: Traffic sign leading to Success/Pixabay*

narrative is finally being challenged. Younger professionals especially are saying: "We love what we do, but that doesn't mean we should sacrifice our health or rights."

**LPH:** Where do you see the most important opportunities for change and can you share some of these recommendations?

**MH:** I think we need action on multiple levels.

**First**, leadership development programs specifically designed for the cultural sector. Generic management courses often don't address the unique challenges of leading creative work—the project-based nature, the passion-driven culture, the complex stakeholder relationships.

**Second**, mentorship networks connecting experienced and emerging leaders. So much valuable knowledge exists in practitioners' heads but never gets systematically shared. Imagine if every new cultural manager had an experienced mentor to call when facing their first budget crisis or personnel conflict.

**Third**, clear onboarding processes for new managers. Organizations must take responsibility for preparing people for leadership roles, not expecting them to magically acquire skills overnight.

But promoting social sustainability requires action at the organizational level too, not just developing individual managers. Our findings revealed that organizations need management-supporting processes and structures, and we identified the necessity for structural changes that promote occupational well-being across the sector. The thesis generated specific action proposals that benefit both TAKU (Trade Union for Art and Culture Professionals in Finland) and the entire sector, including advocating for realistic staffing levels relative to organizational goals—because even the best-trained leader will struggle in an under-resourced environment.

**LPH:** These findings have clear implications beyond Finland, especially as European organizations increasingly focus on ESG compliance. What would you say to international colleagues in the cultural sector?

**MH:** These challenges transcend national boundaries. Whether you're in Helsinki, Amsterdam, or Barcelona, the fundamental issues are similar: creative professionals promoted without preparation, chronic under-resourcing, and organizational systems that don't support sustainable leadership.

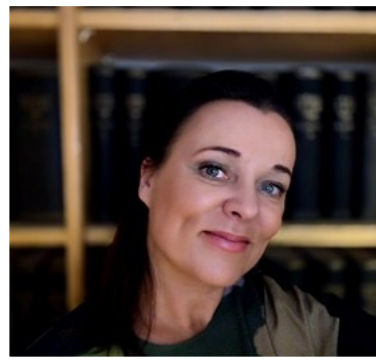
But this also means solutions can be shared internationally. What works in one country's cultural sector can be adapted elsewhere. We need to build networks for exchanging best practices, research findings, and innovative approaches. The cultural sector has always been good at international artistic collaboration—we need to bring that same spirit to addressing our systemic leadership challenges.

I'm also eager to engage in international dialogue. These issues are too important and too widespread for any one country or organization to solve alone.

**LPH:** Thank you, Marika. This conversation confirms what many of us have long suspected: the cultural sector's leadership challenges require urgent attention and collective action. I hope this research sparks broader discussions and, ultimately, meaningful change.

#### Further Reading

Häkkilä, M. & Heininen, M. (2025). Towards Socially Sustainable Leadership: Leadership Culture in Cultural and Event Management and Its Development Towards Social Sustainability. HUMAK University of Applied Sciences. Available in Finnish at: <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2025052013519>



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# LETTERS FROM OUR READERS



**Frédérique Chabaud**  
*ENCATC community member*

## **Questions upon questions: a bright and creative cultural manager as president? Or vice-versa?**

Retired from professional life and still interested in my Belgian surroundings, I was reading a paper by ENCATC a few months ago on the decision to close a culture management course, on various cuts on Education and Culture budgets by countries which actually are usually well-known for their commitment on decent education and spreading good community practices through sound cultural policies. This made me very unhappy thinking of the privilege I had to work in that sphere and what tremendous loss the general cuts in those two priorities of education and culture would mean. This unhappy feeling is now growing to a sense of total defeat with news of the next budget schemes in Europe, at all levels.

But wait - In that depressed state of mind, I heard about a new documentary film on Volodymyr Zelensky on ARTE TV. Indeed it proved quite a choc! It opened a new set of questions to me – as how artistic performance and managerial competences could be transferred into an almost improvised partition as president of a country - at war. An unexpected, immensely challenging role. With emotion and big eyes, I swallowed the two parts of the documentary. I was profoundly moved by the high quality of the enquiry work to observe the personality "Zelinsky" from very close.

I was amazed and speechless wondering how he managed to launch such a brilliant career from a very young age, from the relatively modest surroundings he came from, climbing quickly the stairs from his quartier in Ukraine towards Moscow. All in Russian - his numerous sketches, shows, circus, songs he shaped to be there in the post-soviet times, becoming one very appreciated and loved actor with his band, both at the time in Ukraine and Russia. Completely funny, stunningly absurd, the shows went on and on, with very demanding tour schedules. By the way, aficionados of good series on TV would remember his role as president in the TV runner "Servant of the people". Only ten years ago!

Apart from re-discovering his turbulent youth and the many ingenuous and less ingenuous bursts of laughing he could provoke, something peculiar crossed my mind watching him. He is an artist, he has had a tough start, he built up his career within the larger realm of what was left from the USSR, being loved as an actor and comedian equally by Ukrainians and Russians, and further audiences. How did he do it in the first place? What skills did he develop to manage his success? We see him during the tournees, sleeping in a bus, enduring quite a

few discomforts, imagining, inventing with his team of actors and organisers, new sketches, looking for new venues, promoting their show, convincing big show houses to take them on board – well, all activities of an active, creative and ambitious cultural manager.

And from there on, how does he come to win the elections in his country? Not only by embodying the role in a TV show, which remains incredible enough, but by deploying a whole catalogue of competences revealed through his artistic career.

First of all, and this I didn't realise fully before, he had to learn Ukrainian – and this very shortly before the elections. The documentary film shows him repeating words in Ukrainian while practising some weightlifting exercises! Brilliant and strategic in his appearances during the campaign itself, incredibly clever in the duel performance closing the latest confrontation or contest for presidency, he will gain the battle of words and hope – against his opponent Petro Porochenko in 2019.

Secondly, in his presidential team, he integrates quite a few personalities who participated in Kvartal 95 Studio he founded in 2003, named after the 95th quarter (Kvartal), a district in Kryvyi Rih, the district he comes from. They are artists and managers all the same. Thinking of the goal he set while creating its company: "to make the world a better place, a kinder and more joyful place using the tools we have, which are humor and creativity", I wonder again. One may or may not be enthusiastic about him, his politics, decisions, but would have to agree on how close his team remains, as during their long trips in the country, discussing and shaping their program to the next station of their tour through the continent.

To come back to the latest ENCATC Congress, A Dialogue with Creators to Explore the Relationship between Artists and Cultural Managers, it is not only a question on "how creators and cultural leaders can together contribute to more inclusive, resilient, and regenerative futures" (ENCATC Newsletter, September 2025) but it shows how the balance stroke hard on policy and decision-making in times of extreme danger while not renouncing on creativity, a way of facing the audience and assuming a role, speaking at all levels with all types of interlocutors, improvising certainly, rebounding after all setbacks, and not the least, supporting an incredible work load on one's shoulders. And be the actor who is always on stage! Backed up by an organised team.

One of the topics of the ENCATC congress, being on "building social cohesion, peace, and resilience in the face of conflict and polarization", I would almost go so far that in some cases, cultural management and deep artistic qualities and skills can also lead to forge respect and resistance at higher level in politics – of course, backed up by a resilient and strong population. What conclusion or hope should we all draw out of this observation?

The film on arte documenting his biography, we can see the whole development of his artistic career coming to ... his acceding to the higher job in the country.

[Zelensky \(1/2\) - Regarder le documentaire complet | ARTE](#), by Ariane Chemin, Yves Jeuland and Lisa Vapné.

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its members  
and partners  
for their  
collaborations  
to this issue of  
the magazine!

ENCATC Magazine is a new digital publication with its inaugural issue launched in June 2020. It is meant to educate, entertain, raise awareness, and inform on various topics related to cultural management and policy. It is also created to offer an additional space for the publication of articles to our members, as well as a space for knowledge transfer to our partners (EU, UNESCO, ASEF, etc.).

Our contributors are leading academics, researchers, experts, practitioners, and policy makers. They are recognised by the industry we belong to as influencers. For our magazine, they are generously providing us with high-quality content, commentary, the best industry practices, and personal stories. Their contributions aim to help ENCATC to achieve its mission of helping the cultural sector become stronger and more sustainable. **This publication is made possible thanks to the financial support of the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.**

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