

The social dimension of culture

How cultural initiatives and CCIs
can impact social policies on the ground

*A policy brief from the Policy Learning Platform
for a more social Europe*

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Summary

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) and other cultural initiatives can play a major role preserving and strengthening social cohesion. Local and regional authorities that wish to enhance the social dimension of cultural activities can draw on some key European policy frameworks. As part of the 2005 Faro Convention on the value of Cultural Heritage for Society, networks of practitioners have been set up and methods and tools have been developed. The 2021 Porto Santo Charter promotes notions of cultural democracy and cultural citizenship. The European Commission also has an Agenda for Culture and provides funding for cultural initiatives through the Creative Europe programme. Other EU sources of funding can also be mobilised for cultural initiatives, such as Cohesion Policy and European Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Interreg Europe projects provide concrete examples of good practice on how to implement cultural policies with positive impacts on social cohesion. These examples approach the social significance of culture in different ways:

1. as a bond between people sharing the same territory or history,
2. as way of strengthening the cultural capital of groups and individuals, contributing to education and lifelong learning, labour market integration and acquisition of skills,
3. as a resource for territorial development.

Policy recommendations describe on how such good practices could be transposed to other regions while optimising possibilities of using European funding sources, e.g. by integrating culture in integrated territorial strategies.

The knowledge, solutions and good practices showcased in this policy brief come mainly from Interreg Europe projects.

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Social dimensions of CCI promotion and cultural initiatives

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) are mostly referred to as part of the effort to promote economic development and growth. This aspect was focused in a recent [Interreg Europe policy brief](#). However, as other cultural activities, CCIs work with heritage, identities, creativity and communication. **CCIs and cultural initiatives make an important contribution to binding communities together**, generating trust and mutual understanding and helping make democratic societies function.

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, a full scale experiment was carried out. Access to arts and culture was massively reduced. For some months, it was hardly possible to enjoy live music, theatres, cinema, dance, museums and heritage sites. Collective cultural activities such as choirs, orchestras, amateur theatre, arts and crafts group also could not operate normally. This made the vital importance for social interaction and general well-being even more obvious.

The present policy brief presents **key policy design frameworks, resources and good practice examples for the pursuit of social objectives through cultural initiatives and CCI promotion**. It approaches this issue from the perspective of local and regional authorities and with a focus on its European dimensions. The objective is to provide an overview of current frameworks for local and regional cultural policies with social ambitions.

The evolution of social objectives in cultural policies

While cultural policies have always been driven by social objectives, their nature has evolved over time ([P.M. Menger, 2010](#)). From the 1950s, cultural policies gained momentum as part of the strengthening of welfare states. The initial objective was to “bring culture to the people”. This top-down perspective was implemented primarily by national governments (regional ones in the case of federal states). The focus was on a broader diffusion of excellence in art, often defined based on normative and elitist criteria. These policies came to focus on promoting a territorially balanced supply of cultural offers, e.g. public libraries, theatres and museums. As part of this process, they were progressively decentralised in Western Europe. From the 1960s onwards, local and regional authorities were often actively involved in their design and implementation. In Baltic and Central and Eastern European countries, cultural policies remained centralised until after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In this initial phase, ties to for-profit cultural activities and recognition of cultural diversity were weak. When the welfare state model was challenged by enhanced international economic competition and successive crises, social objectives progressively broadened to include e.g. the **promotion of multicultural dialogue and cohesion in local communities**. In parallel, **cultural industries experienced exponential growth**. Heritage and culture-related **tourism** became a major component of many local and regional economies. Cultural policies became levers to promote growth.

More recently, **creativity has been identified as a goal in its own right**. This is linked to the adoption of economic growth models based on innovation. The underlying rationale is that creative individuals and communities are also prone to be more innovative. In parallel, some actors consider culture as a possible antidote to individualism, and as a way of strengthening the community and the collective. From this perspective, cultural policies should put more emphasis on participation in group activities. Culture is also approached as a vector of dialogue between individuals that can both strengthen communities and help overcome barriers between communities.

Classification of social objectives pursued by cultural policies

Building on the analysis of regional and local cultural policies addressed in interregional cooperation projects of Interreg Europe, the social dimensions of culture and creative sectors can be divided in **three key components**, each of which approach culture from different perspectives:

1. as a bond between people sharing the same territory or history,
2. as way of strengthening the cultural capital of groups and individuals, contributing to education and lifelong learning, labour market integration and acquisition of skills,
3. as a resource for territorial development, linked to tourism and innovation.

Interreg Europe projects have identified a wide range of good practices focusing on the above perspectives, source of inspiration to all policy makers across the EU.

Structure of the policy brief

This policy brief presents European reference documents promoting culture as a lever of social cohesion, which have respectively been elaborated under the auspices of the Council of Europe and Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU. A second section offers a succinct overview of EU policies in this field, describing main strategic perspectives and a selection of funding opportunities. The last section provides an overview of learnings and recommendations from the Interreg Europe community building on good practices identified in the field of cultural policies.

Key European policy frameworks

Discussions on social dimensions of cultural policy are closely linked to debates on European values and on strategies to uphold them. Two documents play a key role in this respect: first, the **Faro Convention**, which was adopted in 2005 and is accompanied by an Action Plan. Second, the **Porto Santo Charter**, drafted in 2021.

The 2005 Faro Convention on the value of Cultural Heritage for Society

The Council of Europe’s [Faro Convention](#) promotes a people-centred and inclusive approach to cultural heritage. Unlike traditional views that often prioritise monuments and artefacts, it broadens the definition of cultural heritage to include all aspects of human existence – both tangible and intangible – that communities value. It recognises the dynamic nature of cultural heritage and the need to integrate it into the fabric of everyday life.

One of the fundamental objectives of the Convention is to defend individual rights to take part in cultural heritage. It specifies how such cultural rights should be defended in Europe, and highlights links to human rights and democracy.

The Faro Convention also proposes concrete methods for **self-assessed baseline measures of cultural heritage governance frameworks**, presented in the [Faro Convention Action Plan Handbook](#). These are designed for the [Faro Convention Network](#), a platform for “groups of practitioners and facilitators of heritage-led and people-centred actions in towns and territories”. However, its principles can also be relevant for initiatives that are not part of this network.

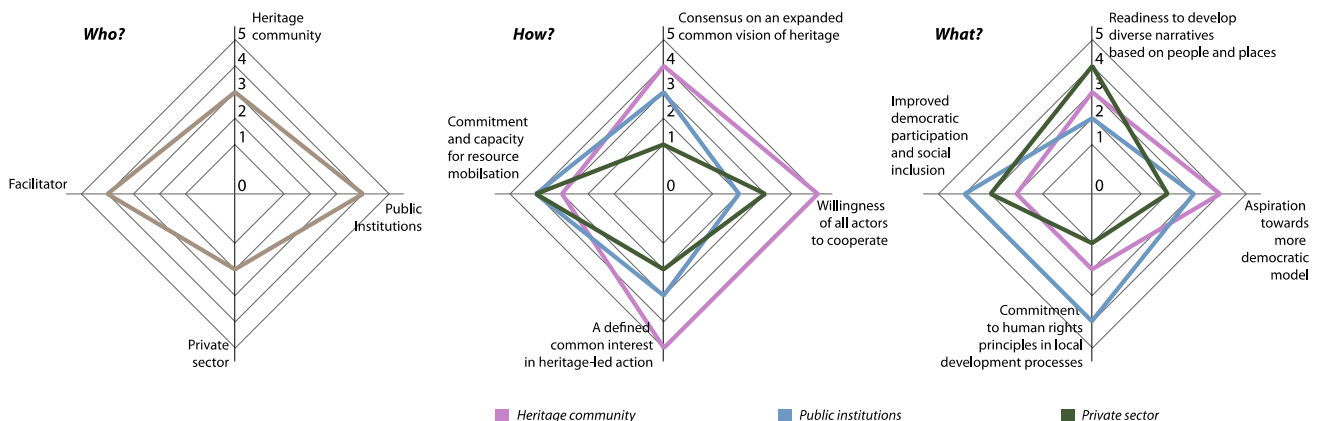
Each heritage community is invited to organise an inclusive participative process of self-assessment. This process covers three dimensions, “Who?”, “How?” and “What?”. Communities are asked to arrive at a consensual grading on a scale from 1 (‘Inexistent’) to 5 (‘Excellent’) in response to predefined questions under each dimension (see Table 4). Cerreta and Giovane di Girasole (2020) have illustrated how this framework can be used to characterise individual cultural initiatives, as exemplified in the table and figure below.

Self-assessment framework of the faro convention

Who?	How would you rate the presence and engagement of...	Process facilitator(s)
		Public institutions
		Private sector bodies
		The Heritage Community, civil society representatives
How?	What is the level of consensus on an expanded common vision of heritage?	
	What is the level of willingness of stakeholders to cooperate (local authorities and civil society)?	
	To what extent has common interest of a heritage-led action been defined?	
	To what extent have stakeholders demonstrated a commitment and a capacity to mobilise resources?	
What?	To what extent are the community members ready to engage in the process of developing diverse narratives based on the people and places?	
	To what extent are community members committed to implement a more democratic and participative socio-economic model?	
	To what extent are community members committed to apply human rights principles in local development processes (respect for dignity and multiple identities)?	
	To what extent do community members seek to improve democratic participation and social inclusion of all inhabitants?	

Source: [Faro Convention Action Plan Handbook](#)

Scoring system of the Faro Convention self-assessment scheme



Source: Own elaboration inspired by [Cerreta and Giovane di Girsole \(2020\)](#). Scores are for illustrative purposes only.

Your Faro Way

The Faro Convention role-playing game “[Your Faro Way](#)” was developed as one of the outcomes in the framework of the Council of Europe-European Union Joint project “The Faro Way: enhanced participation in cultural heritage”. It seeks to promote the Faro Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society in innovative ways and actively engages different stakeholders in its implementation. Users are given the opportunity to take on the roles of different heritage stakeholders in the development of heritage projects. This makes it possible for them to acquire hands-on knowledge of how to implement such projects in practice.

The Faro Convention has therefore been accompanied by the elaboration and testing of methods and tools to **enhance cultural initiatives’ impacts on social cohesion**. These tools could be applied to a wider range of cultural project activities, e.g. in the framework of Cohesion Policy.

Currently, actors in the field of local and regional development have only to a limited extent capitalised on advances in the cultural field to optimise their design and implementation of cultural measures. Admittedly, the Faro convention is often invoked to help justify a social perspective on cultural policies. This has for example been the case in the context of the Interreg Europe [P-IRIS](#), [FINCH](#) and [KEEP ON](#) projects. However, methods and tools to help optimise social impacts of cultural initiatives are seldom applied.

The 2021 Porto Santo Charter - towards a working paradigm for cultural democracy in Europe

The Porto Santo Charter is an initiative of the 2021 Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, and the output of a participatory process that involved representatives of EU Member States as well as [European cultural networks and organisations](#).

The objective is to provide an operational framework to **enhance the resilience of EU democracies through cultural policies**. The Charter puts particular emphasis on European values of diversity and social cohesion, and on the benefits of allowing EU citizens to actively participate in cultural activities.

Cultural democracy

The Charter provides principles and recommendations for applying and developing a working paradigm for “cultural democracy” in Europe. The notion of “cultural democracy” refers to **active and inclusive participation of citizens in cultural activities and associated decision-making processes**. From this perspective culture is considered ‘democratic’ insofar as it is inclusive, open to grassroots impulses and individual initiatives.

The authors of the Charter suggest that further policy efforts are needed to establish culture as a platform which each person and organisation can participate in and be responsible for. They consider this “shift from the model of cultural consumption to a model of cultural commitment” as a precondition to make culture a vector of emancipation and empowerment.

The Charter posits that decisions in the field of culture are intrinsic to individual fulfilment of EU citizens and to the quality of social interaction. Inadequate decision-making processes can therefore have major deleterious effects on democracy and social cohesion in Europe. **It offers concrete proposals on how public authorities at all levels could raise their game when it comes to organising participative processes and designing and implementing policies promoting cultural democracy.**

Cultural citizenship

While cultural democracy characterises organisations and processes, cultural citizenship refers to the ways in which **individuals engage with, contribute to, and derive identity from their cultural surroundings**. It transcends traditional notions of citizenship by recognizing the importance of cultural participation and expression in shaping inclusive societies.

Three main perspectives on cultural citizenship emerge in the Charter:

1. **Inclusive Participation:** Some perspectives emphasize cultural citizenship as a means to ensure the inclusive participation of all citizens in cultural life. The Porto Santo Charter insists particularly on the importance of achieving full cultural citizenship among youth. This involves making culture for accessible, fostering a sense of belonging among diverse communities and establishing spaces of cultural participation that are inclusive and pluralist.
2. **Cultural Rights:** cultural citizenship can be viewed through the lens of cultural rights, arguing that individuals have the right to express, maintain, and develop their cultural identity. This perspective places an emphasis on the protection of minority cultures and languages. It also implies that policies facilitate individual processes of creating meaning for all citizens, irrespective of their background and preconditions.
3. **Digital Cultural Citizenship:** In the digital age, cultural citizenship extends to the online realm. It includes the right to participate in digital culture, access digital resources, and contribute to the creation of a shared digital cultural space.

EU policies promoting culture for social cohesion

The European Commission plays a proactive role in designing new models of cultural governance and supporting innovation in the cultural and creative sectors. Social cohesion has been identified as a priority objective in European Commission cultural policies.

The European Commission’s New Agenda for Culture of 2018

The European Commission published its ‘[New Agenda for Culture](#)’ in 2018. Together with its accompanying Staff Working Document, it is said to “focus on the positive contribution that culture brings to Europe’s society, its economy and international relations”, with specific objectives belonging to the social, economic and external dimensions fields. Based on the Agenda and [Staff Working Document](#), main social objectives can be identified (see Table 1 below). The agenda also identifies policy interventions that would play a key role in the achievement of these objectives. It implies that a broad range of social objectives are pursued, including health, cultural sector job creation and labour market functioning, gender equality, inclusion, integration of migrants and third country nationals and community-building at all scales. The [Staff Working Document](#) synthesises this by stating that the Agenda “aims to harness the full potential of culture to help build a more inclusive and fairer Union, supporting innovation, creativity and sustainable jobs and growth”.

Pursued social objectives	Corresponding policy interventions
Foster cultural capability	Make cultural activities available
Improve health and well-being	Provide opportunities to participate actively in cultural activities
Stimulate creativity and critical thinking, extended to all levels of education and training	
Reinforce a sense of common European identity	Raise awareness of common European history and values
	Promote Europe’s culture heritage
Regenerate communities	Invest in cultural infrastructure
	Organise territorially targeted initiatives such as European Capitals of culture
	Develop high quality built environments
Integrate refugees and other migrants	Provide spaces for refugees and migrants to lead arts and culture projects
Integrate third country nationals	Use cultural participation to bring people together
Facilitate exchanges between regions and countries	
Encourage mobility of professionals in the culture and creativity sectors	Remove obstacles to mobility
	Organise mobility schemes
Generate jobs and facilitate integration of youth in the labour market	Promote growth in the cultural sector
Increase female labour participation	Reward cultural projects guaranteeing gender equality

Table 1: Key social objectives of the 2018 New agenda for culture, and factors of change identified to generate them

Creative Europe programme

One of the main EU cultural policy instrument is the Creative Europe programme. It is divided in three strands ('Culture', 'Media' and 'Cross-sectoral'). In 2021 and 2022, it supported 1,909 international cooperation projects representing a total of 674 million EUR of funding. The programme [monitoring report](#) published in November 2023 approaches social impacts mainly from the perspective of social inclusion and gender equality. It states that out of 291 projects funded under the 'Culture' strand, 19% selected the social inclusion priority. This implies that **a significant proportion of projects focus on social outcomes**.

The programme also currently funds a preparatory action 'Bottom-up Policy Development for Culture & Well-being' called [CultureForHealth](#). The action explores the critical role of culture in improving health and wellbeing in dialogue with local and cultural actors. It also collects good practices in this field.

Creative Europe projects financed in each EU region can be listed using the [project search interface](#).

Cohesion Policy funding of cultural initiatives

Under Cohesion Policy, 'culture and sustainable tourism' is one of the specific objectives pursued under 'Policy Objective 4 – Social Europe'. Current programme budgets imply that EU contributions to investments in this field will amount to close to 5 billion EUR in the 2021-2027 programming period. The highest planned volumes of investments are observed in Poland. This specific objective has only been selected by 'mainstream' programmes in 15 out of 27 Member States. However, this cultural investment with a social ambition can also have been supported under other headings, e.g. SME support.

	Culture and sustainable tourism	Share
Denmark	17 million EUR	3.4%
Poland	1,666 million EUR	2.2%
Malta	18 million EUR	2.1%
Slovakia	234 million EUR	1.9%
Czechia	361 million EUR	1.7%
Lithuania	104 million EUR	1.6%
Croatia	124 million EUR	1.4%
France	179 million EUR	1.0%
Greece	172 million EUR	0.8%
Italy	327 million EUR	0.8%
Portugal	157 million EUR	0.7%
Slovenia	20 million EUR	0.6%
Spain	213 million EUR	0.6%
Latvia	21 million EUR	0.5%
Romania	116 million EUR	0.4%

Table 2: Volumes and shares of Cohesion Policy funding

Source: [Open Cohesion Data Platform](#)

Interreg cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes have an established tradition of using culture as a lever of enhanced dialogue and integration. These efforts are pursued in the current programming period, as 11.8% of the total EU contribution to Interreg is allocated to specific objective 'culture and sustainable tourism'.

EIT Culture & Creativity Initiative

The [European Institute of Innovation and Technology](#) (EIT) runs a 7-year [Culture & Creativity initiative](#). This is one of nine Knowledge & Innovation Communities (KICs). Its social objectives are presented in the [first call for Proposals 2023](#). They are based on the observation of a “lack of connection between parts of society and different territories”, and of a need for more “inclusive, culture-led societal innovation” to help overcome “the relative exclusion of women, immigrants, low-income groups, lower education level groups, longer term unemployed people and others”.

In the social field, the 2023 call addressed **social fragmentation** under the heading ‘Community Catalyser’. It supports replicable, place-based social innovations by actors in the field of Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI).

European Recovery and Resilience Facility

The Recovery and Resilience Facility has funded [cultural initiatives with a social dimension](#) in some Member States. One can in particular mention initiatives in the following countries:



The recurring components are **digitalisation** as a factor of enhanced access to culture, and **improved built environments** as factors of quality of life and social cohesion. The latter aspect echoes [Davos Declaration](#) of 2019 *Towards high-quality Baukultur for Europe*, in which Ministers of Culture stated that high-quality built environments are a prerequisite for balanced social development. In this document, culture is symbolically referred to as the '*glue of communities*'.

Culture initiatives with social ambitions in EU regions

Learnings and recommendations from the Interreg Europe community relate to different aspects of regional and local cultural policies linking CCIs to a social dimension. As mentioned earlier in the text, social dimensions can be categorised as follows:

1. as a **bond between people** sharing the same territory or history,
2. as way of **strengthening the cultural capital of groups and individuals**, contributing to education and lifelong learning, labour market integration and acquisition of skills,
3. as a **resource for territorial development**.

In this chapter, good practices from Interreg Europe projects provide a concrete illustration of the above elements.

1. Creating a bond between people

Heritage is often associated to geographic areas or territories. This is certainly the case for tangible (built) heritage, with historical buildings, such as castles, fortresses, or pieces of art. But this is also true for intangible heritage: [UNESCO](#) describes it as including “oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts”. As shown by the Dutch good practice below, it is sometimes necessary to record and document such heritage to help make the local population more aware of it while at the same time creating opportunities to stimulate a feeling of belonging to a place and a community.

GOOD PRACTICE 1: Recording and documenting cultural fishery heritage in Zeeland (Netherlands)



Since 2018, Zeeland Heritage has developed a new strategic narrative to preserve, protect and strengthen the heritage of Zeeland. This strategy targets both inhabitants and tourists. A wide range of stakeholders including entrepreneurs from the tourism sector, local and provincial authorities, museums and citizens have been involved. Creating broad support among stakeholders has been a key success factor: they met during multiple meetings where they provided input for the collection of the intangible heritage of the region. Visitors and inhabitants benefit from a more coherent narrative about Zeeland, with more accurate and comprehensive

information. The practice includes several innovative elements such as the collaboration with concept designers for food which resulted in the development of a new food-related products. A digital repository with sources on intangible heritage has also been established.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

The bond in communities is reinforced by the **participatory process** of collecting and creating cultural products. The “cultural practice” becomes the product of communities’ involvement and dedicated initiatives can bring together residents of an area with cultural specificities, as illustrated by the good practice in Spain below.

GOOD PRACTICE 2: Participatory process for the creation of the Maritime Museum of Mallorca (Spain)



In 2018 the Consortium for a Maritime Museum of Mallorca launched an inclusive and participatory process to validate the museum project and to create a **social and territorial museum**. This helped ensure that stakeholders (associations, fishermen, residents, etc.) had their say on this project, to enhance the community character of the cultural heritage in the Balearic Islands. Stakeholders were also involved in the co-creation of museum activities such as educational events and workshops.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

2. Strengthening the cultural capital for education, labour market integration and skills

Cultural policies are also about providing spaces that allow people to meet and interact in a stimulating environment with the objective to create opportunities for education, labour market integration, skills development. Culture becomes a means to experiment, learn and stimulate interdisciplinary works across professionals.

The following three examples show the involvement of educational institutes in creating linkages with the CCI sector to stimulate job creation, supporting youth in entering the labour market, putting art and culture as core focus of skills development.

GOOD PRACTICE 3: Open design school (Italy)



The recourse to co-creation and co-working not only helps optimise social impacts of cultural initiatives. It is also in many cases a critical component of their success. The [Open Design School](#) was set up by the Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation¹ as an interdisciplinary experimentation laboratory where professionals can meet to develop co-design methodologies as part of the Matera 2019 European Capital of Culture. The [Salzkammergut-Bad Ischl European Capital of Culture 2024](#) is interested in adopting the same methodology.

[Click here to find out more about this good practice.](#)

¹ The Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation was set up in 2014 as the body responsible for implementing the actions described in the City of Matera’s application to be European Capital of Culture for 2019.

GOOD PRACTICE 4: Cork art therapy (Ireland)



Art Therapy - as a response to a need for a deeper register of expression – fuses aspects of the disciplines of Modern Art, Outsider Art and Art Education together with Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy to provide practical mental and physical health benefits for practitioners.

Over the course of a week, a series of related lectures, seminars and experiential workshops provide a context for the current practice of art therapy through engaging with and developing a

personal understanding of the creative processes – through reflective learning – in a series of studio based workshops.

The school contribute significantly to the local mainstream and niche creative tourism sectors. The summer school was a forerunner to the professional Art Therapy qualification in Ireland, campaigned for by the early stage participants and evolving over the years.

[Click here to find out more about this good practice.](#)

GOOD PRACTICE 5: FOODBIZ: University and business learning for new employability paths



FoodBiz is a cooperation framework between higher education institutes and local CCIs on food and gastronomy, agriculture, hospitality and tourism. Food is part of intangible heritage, as embedded in local local identities of destinations for CCT product development. Based on the concept of University-Business cooperation, FOODBIZ promotes food and gastronomy tourism services through the acquisition of relevant skills and competences related to employability in higher education students, through their active involvement in community learning activities. Students are active in the community to which their belong during the study, bringing into the university the knowledge of the community and vice-versa, and co-creating with other players, as peer, new knowledge and innovation.

The key element is the concept of 'co-creation' including CCIS, which takes place when all the players involved establish a dialogue, reciprocal understanding and common goals. FOODBIZ is an outcome an Erasmus+ project 2017-19.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

3. Becoming a resource for territorial development

Many EU territories have, to a greater or lesser extent, been 'commodified' as tourism destinations building on cultural specificities such as built heritage and gastronomic traditions. The coexistence of cultural spaces and practices envisaged as 'commodities', on the one hand, and as components of local social life, on the other, often raises issues. However, 'commodification' of local heritage can also be a component of socially responsible reinvention strategies, as illustrated by the two good practices below.

GOOD PRACTICE 6: Quinto Mummy Museum in Zaragoza (Spain)

Quinto Mummy Museum was opened in 2018 in response to the need to reactivate the local economy and halt ongoing depopulation in the area. An opportunity for a novel project arose when tombs containing mummified human remains were found in Quinto. The 15th-century Mudéjar church, a historical building of artistic interest, offered the perfect venue. The museum demonstrates how a municipal project to enhance culture, social cohesion and the economy in a specific place can activate assets that were previously unused and practically unknown despite their historical importance.



[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

GOOD PRACTICE 7: Legends of Āraiši - Storytelling and Community-Based Tourism (Latvia)



Āraiši is small scenic rural location in Latvia. Its local tourism development strategy is based on public-private cooperation and on involvement of the entire community. It focuses on storytelling traditions, helping to generate employment for storytellers/guides, craftsmen, musicians, caterers, food and souvenir makers and accommodation providers. Legends told from generations to generations are used in tourism through a game, music, performances and excursions. They also provide marketing and development platform for local businesses. This creative use of storytelling traditions for tourism development also helps to preserve and transmit an important intangible cultural heritage.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

Local and regional cultural policies pursue social objectives from different angles. They may be envisaged as policies of 'territorial identity' strengthening ties between inhabitants, promoting intercultural dialogue, providing cultural services of general interest, or acting for socially responsible economic development. Even if corresponding objectives are different, Interreg Europe good practices have shown that they can be pursued in parallel.

Impacts of cultural digitalisation

In recent years, local and regional actors in the cultural field have been confronted to an acceleration of digitalisation processes. Corresponding solutions were addressed in a [dedicated Interreg Europe policy brief](#) in 2018. The COVID-19 crises since further amplified these trends. The Porto Santo Charter presented earlier in the text clearly mentions digital cultural citizenship as one of the main factors characterising the right of individuals to engage with, contribute to, and derive identity from their cultural surroundings.

Digitalisation is a game changer in multiple respects. The development of video streaming, augmented and virtual reality, e-books, communication in social media generate new opportunities and challenges. A main policy objective has been to accompany digital transitions of cultural sector actors with limited resources, e.g. with respect to the promotion of cultural services and the design of cultural activities and services using digital tools. The Astra Museum's investment in virtual reality exhibitions described below provides an illustration of such transitions.

GOOD PRACTICE 8: Astra Museum Virtual Reality Experience (Romania)



The Astra Open Air Museum in Sibiu used virtual reality technology to present its collections in a more attractive way, making visitors part of the exploration of traditional Romanian rural life.

This allowed the museum to attract a greater number of visitors, and increase the population's awareness of its heritage. Allegedly, digitalisation brings more opportunities for culture to be more accessible to visitors and residents.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

Digitalisation can improve the quality and effectiveness of cultural policies, e.g. by better exploiting available evidence. This has been illustrated by the use Digital Twins in the management of heritage in Italian cities.

GOOD PRACTICE 9: The smart cultural city to leverage the heritage: The Digital Twin Experience (Italy)



The practice introduces innovative ways to support cities monitoring and managing cultural heritage, using a Digital Twin integrating data collection, aggregation, artificial intelligence analytic and virtual representations. People flows, mobility and transport, environment, energy, social media, city modelling, infrastructure, model of building, KPI (SDG, 15 Min City Index, etc.) and Social Media monitoring and other data are exploited.

So an integrated environment is created to perform predictions and analysis, reducing time and costs for the analyses and providing detailed views that otherwise would not be possible. This helps plan for a more socially responsible cultural tourism.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

Policy recommendations

Positive effects of CCI promotion and cultural initiatives on social cohesion can be enhanced by optimising the design of existing policies in European localities and regions, and capitalising on synergies between them.

- This first implies that the **notion of CCI is reframed**. CCIs are currently mainly targeted as part of growth and economic development strategies. However, as illustrated by multiple Interreg Europe good practices, they also promote social integration and cohesion and generate employment opportunities that can help integrate specific segments of the population in the labour market (e.g. youth, with the example of [FoodBiz](#) or the [Open Design School](#) from the projects Cult-create and Ecoc-SME). CCI activities are seldom purely defined as “profit generating creative activities”, but to different extents involve elements of e.g. “high art”, “daily cultural practices”, “craftmanship”. This is a starting point for identifying potential social cohesion benefits that can be achieved when promoting them.
- Second, we have described sources of funding for cultural initiatives targeting social integration (through the Creative Europe Programme and the EIT Culture & Creativity Initiative), and for balanced regional development targeting culture (as part of Cohesion Policy, the Recovery and Resilience Fund). **Strategic approaches to combining sources of funding can help to optimise overall effects**. Their complementarities can be better identified, and synergies between initiatives can be optimised.
- Third, a **convergence of governance approaches** can be identified. Cohesion Policy promotes community-led, participative approaches to local and regional development. In the current programming period, Policy Objective 5 “Europe Closer to Citizen” focuses specifically on integrated territorial approaches. Territorial identities and culture can play an important role in these processes, bringing actors closer and strengthening links between them. The Faro Convention’s notion of ‘heritage communities’, and the methods and tools it has inspired, could be instrumental in promoting these integrated territorial approaches, such as in the case of the [Maritime Museum of Mallorca \(project CHERISH\)](#). Similarly, the Porto Santo Charter’s notions of Cultural Democracy and Cultural Citizenship provide frameworks for socially inclusive cultural policies. **Envisaging culture as a platform for integrated territorial development** broadens its significance for balanced and sustainable economic and social development.
- Fourth, rapid advances of **digitalisation in the field of culture offer potentially useful policy levers**, and are associated to a certain number of **threats**. Digital solutions occupy a prominent place in CCI promotion activities and other cultural policy initiatives. While they generate major growth and economic development perspectives, associated societal challenges are also well identified. The Porto Santo Charter’s principles of cultural democracy and cultural citizenship, including digital cultural citizenship, provide possible frameworks for the design of local and regional digital transitions in the cultural field. This inter alia implies a focus on digital solutions designed to empower inhabitants through knowledge and education, valuing diverse cultural identities and practices, and contributing to make heritage more accessible, as it is the case for the [Astra Museum](#) in Romania ([project CHERISH](#)). It also implies inclusive and participative governance frameworks for digital transitions in culture – see the [Digital Twin Experience](#) in Italy (project [CD-ETA](#)).

Sources and further information

Our experts provide a tailored set of resources, contacts, or in-depth analyses to help you find the answers you are looking for. Explore our services that can help you solve your regional policy challenges.

Event learnings

- Webinar recording: [Cultural and Creative Industries: Towards a more social Europe](#)
- Webinar recording: [Synergies between traditional operators and cultural creative industries: key learnings](#)
- Webinar recording: [Cultural and Creative Industries: Towards a green and digital Europe](#)
- Webinar recording: [Cultural Heritage as an Opportunity for Sustainable Tourism](#)

Policy briefs

- [Cultural and Creative industries](#)
- [Digital solutions in the field of cultural heritage](#)
- [Citizen engagement in the protection of cultural heritage](#)

Stories and articles

- [Adaptive reuse of religious heritage](#)
- [Rural tourism based on local heritage and gastronomy](#)
- [Solidarity tourism – different ways to discover a territory](#)

Ongoing Interreg Europe projects

- [CHERRY - making Culture tHe N°1 ally of European RecoveRY](#)
- [TIB – Tourism in Balance](#)

Interreg Europe Programme

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Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform is the second action of the Interreg Europe programme. It aims to boost EU-wide policy learning and builds on good practices related to regional development policies.

The Platform is a space where the European policy-making community can tap into the know-how of regional policy experts and peers. It offers information on a variety of topics via thematic publications, online and onsite events, and direct communication with a team of experts.

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform expert services

Our team of experts provide a set of services that can help you with regional policy challenges. Get in contact with our experts to discuss the possibilities:



Via the [policy helpdesk](#), policymakers may submit their questions to receive a set of resources ranging from inspiring good practices from across Europe, policy briefs, webinar recordings, information about upcoming events, available European support and contacts of relevant people, as well as matchmaking recommendations and peer review opportunities.



A [matchmaking session](#) is a thematic discussion hosted and moderated by the Policy Learning Platform, designed around the policy needs and questions put forward by the requesting public authority or agency. It brings together peers from other European regions to present their experience and successes, to provide inspiration for overcoming regional challenges.



[Peer reviews](#) are the deepest and most intensive of the on-demand services, bringing together peers from a number of regions for a two-day work session, to examine the specific territorial and thematic context of the requesting region, discuss with stakeholders, and devise recommendations.

Discover more: www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning

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