

INVESTING IN CULTURE, CREATIVITY AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH IN THE NEXT MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

*A joint contribution from the PACESETTERS
and S+T+ARTS EC(H)O projects*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Europe's next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 offers a unique opportunity to position **Culture and Creative Industries (CCIs) as a strategic pillar of European competitiveness, resilience and democratic innovation.**

Drawing on evidence from the Horizon Europe projects PACESETTERS and S+T+ARTS EC(H)O, this position paper argues that **investing in artistic research and cultural ecosystems is a strategic investment in Europe's future.** The main three key messages that emerge are:

- **Practice-based research through the arts can create the R&D capacities urgently needed in fragmented CCIs.**

Europe's CCIs are characterised by highly fragmented ecosystems dominated by SMEs, micro-enterprises and freelancers, limiting their capacity for sustained research and innovation. **Practice-based artistic research can provide the collaborative R&D infrastructure** needed to transform isolated projects into long-term innovation ecosystems, fostering knowledge transfer, experimentation and skills development. This requires **recognising artistic research as a cutting-edge form of academic research in its own right**, one that generates rigorous knowledge through practice, experimentation and interdisciplinary collaboration, while addressing complex societal and technological challenges.

- **Next-generation collaborations between art, science and technology are essential for better policy and innovation.**

The most pressing societal and technological challenges, from Artificial Intelligence (AI) to climate transition and democratic resilience, require **interdisciplinary approaches that integrate artistic practice from the outset.** Art–Science–Technology collaborations generate more inclusive, human-centred and anticipatory forms of innovation while producing evidence that strengthens policy design, governance and public trust.

- **Cultural and linguistic diversity is Europe's unique competitive advantage.**

Europe's global leadership cannot rely solely on technological excellence. Its greatest strategic asset is its cultural richness, linguistic diversity and creative capacity. Future European investments must therefore protect and leverage this diversity as a source of innovation, competitiveness, democratic resilience and international influence, ensuring that **digital transformation reinforces rather than erodes Europe's cultural fabric.**

This position paper translates these principles into concrete recommendations for the next MFF, the European Competitiveness Fund, Horizon Europe, Creative Europe and Cohesion Policy.

BACKGROUND

Europe is at a decisive juncture. Negotiations on the next MFF are underway, and the architecture of the EU's next research and innovation programme, the successor to Horizon Europe, is being defined within the proposed European Competitiveness Fund (ECF).

On 16 June 2026, the Council agreed its partial negotiating position. The Council's agreement is partial because it excludes the budgetary and horizontal provisions, which remain under negotiation as part of the overall MFF package. This position now serves as the Council's mandate for negotiations with the European Parliament, with the aim of reaching an overall agreement on the 2028–2034 MFF by the end of 2026. Between June and October 2026, there is still the possibility to advocate for specific topics to the national governments of EU member states to negotiate for the next MFF. Decisions made in the coming months will determine whether cultural and creative sectors remain integral to European research, innovation and cohesion policy or are progressively marginalised within it.

PACESETTERS and S+T+ARTS EC(H)O are two EU-funded initiatives that have demonstrated, in concrete terms, the contribution of arts, culture and creative practices to European innovation ecosystems. We add our voice to that of Culture Action Europe, ELIA, the Artistic Research Alliance (ARA), the Society for Artistic Research^[1] (SAR), the Cost Action ArtInRARE and the wider community of practice in **calling for a substantially strengthened and better-structured investment in CCIs and artistic research in the next MFF.**

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This position paper draws directly on evidence generated through our projects and on the reflections articulated at the SAR 2026 Policy Roundtable in Galway, where representatives of the European artistic research and innovation communities reached strong convergence on the priorities set out below. **The argument for investing in CCIs is no longer simply cultural. It is strategic, economic and democratic.**

CCIs represent one of Europe's most distinctive competitive sectors that are by their nature cross-disciplinary, human-centred and resilient to straightforward automation. CCIs directly employ over 8 million people across the EU, contribute approximately 4.4% of EU GDP, and sustain dense networks of micro-enterprises and freelancers that anchor local and regional economies. They are also among the fastest-growing sectors in the digital economy, producing content, experiences and tools that generate value across the single market and in global exports.

Beyond their direct economic contribution, CCIs serve as connective tissue for European soft power, linguistic and cultural diversity, democratic discourse and social cohesion. These are not secondary considerations; they are the **conditions under which a competitive and resilient Europe is possible.**

Artistic research, as a methodology for knowledge production, contributes dimensions to innovation that traditional R&I frameworks often lack the capacity to question technological trajectories before they become embedded, to reveal hidden assumptions in data and algorithms, to imagine alternative futures, and to design with communities rather than for them.

[1] https://cdn.ymaws.com/elia-artschools.org/resource/resmgr/elia.site-ym.com/Leveraging_the_Full_Potential.pdf

BACKGROUND

We recognise and build upon the advocacy of Culture Action Europe^[2], ELIA^{[3][4][5]} and #NamePlaceFund^[6] allied organisations, who have consistently argued that:

- **Creative Europe remains chronically underfunded relative to the economic and social weight of the sectors it supports.** At less than 0.2% of the total MFF, the programme's budget is incommensurate with the CCIs' share of EU GDP and employment;
- **Arts, culture and artistic research have repeatedly demonstrated their capacity to strengthen European research and innovation**, yet this contribution remains insufficiently embedded in the design of Horizon Europe and related programmes. Future programmes should integrate artistic research from the outset as a strategic driver of human-centred, interdisciplinary innovation.
- **Cohesion funds, while significant in volume, are insufficiently tailored to the specific characteristics of CCI investment** — short project cycles, intangible outputs, cross-border collaboration models — and administrative burdens disproportionately affect small cultural organisations;
- **Evaluation frameworks across EU programmes are poorly adapted** to the non-linear, process-oriented and qualitatively rich outputs that characterise artistic and creative work, systematically undervaluing their contribution;
- **Higher arts education institutions, together with SMEs, micro-enterprises and cultural organisations, often lack** the research infrastructures, institutional capacities and long-term funding mechanisms needed to participate on equal terms in European research and innovation programmes. Strengthening these R&D capacities is essential to unlock the full innovation potential of Europe's cultural and creative ecosystem.

Our experience in PACESETTERS and S+T+ARTS EC(H)O demonstrates two strategic opportunities for the next MFF.

First, Europe should invest in permanent R&D capacities for CCIs. Project-based collaborations consistently generate valuable methodologies, knowledge and networks, but these assets rarely outlive individual projects. Supporting long-term artistic research ecosystems would enable Europe to retain and scale this innovation capacity.

Second, Europe should recognise artistic research and art-science-technology collaboration as strategic innovation methodologies. When these approaches are explicitly embedded in programme design and evaluation, they produce more inclusive, anticipatory and human-centred innovation while strengthening evidence for policymaking.

[2] More information: <https://cultureactioneurope.org/news/>

[3] More information: <https://elia-artschools.org/news/727160/Secure-Cultural-Funding-Endorse-NamePlaceFund-.html>

[4] <https://elia-artschools.org/news/730574/NamePlaceFund-Open-Letter-to-the-Irish-Presidency-of-the-European-Council-.htm>

[5] <https://cdn.ymaws.com/elia-artschools.org/resource/resmgr/elia.site-ym.com/LeapingBeyondtheNow.pdf>

[6] The #NamePlaceFund campaign represents a broad, and growing, coalition of cultural organisations. It is initiated by the Artistic Research Alliance in collaboration with Michael Culture Association—collectively representing over 1,200 institutions across Europe engaged in artistic, cultural, and heritage research

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT MFF

● Integrate CCIs as a Priority Axis of the European Competitiveness Fund

The design of the European Competitiveness Fund represents the most consequential immediate decision for the future of CCIs in EU policy. We are concerned that current discussions risk defining “competitiveness” in narrow technological and industrial terms, leaving culture structurally absent from the fund’s priority axes. This would be a strategic error.

Europe’s competitive advantage in the global economy is not reducible to semiconductor production or AI infrastructure, it lies equally in its capacity to produce culturally grounded, human-centred and democratically accountable innovation. **CCIs are a primary vehicle for that capacity.**

We call for the European Competitiveness Fund to:

- Establish a dedicated priority axis for CCIs, with a ring-fenced allocation reflecting their share of EU economic activity;
- Explicitly include CCIs in the fund’s definition of “strategic sectors,” alongside clean tech, digital infrastructure and advanced manufacturing;
- Fund CCI-led innovation ecosystems, including creative hubs, cultural districts and cross-sectoral clusters that connect CCIs with industry, technology, health, sustainability and education sectors;
- Support structured pathways from experimentation to uptake, enabling prototypes, pilots and practice-based research outcomes to be adopted, adapted and scaled by industry, public sector bodies, cultural institutions and communities;
- Support the internationalisation of European CCIs, including co-production, export and market access instruments targeted at creative enterprises operating across borders;
- Invest in digital transition for CCIs, including access to AI tools, data infrastructure and platform independence, on terms that protect cultural and linguistic diversity, intellectual property and fair remuneration for creators;
- Require that cultural impact assessments be integrated into competitiveness-related investments in digital and technological infrastructure, ensuring that cultural and linguistic diversity is protected by design.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT MFF

Strengthen and Ring-fence Creative Europe

Creative Europe must be significantly increased in the next MFF. Culture Action Europe with more than one hundred European cultural networks and organisations (including ELIA) have called for a budget commensurate with the cultural sector's weight in the European economy^[7].

We endorse this call and add the following specific asks:

- Increase the Creative Europe budget to at least 0.5% of total MFF expenditure, with a dedicated envelope for art–science–technology collaboration building on the S+T+ARTS model;
- Introduce multi-annual project grants (minimum three years) to address the structural fragility caused by short funding cycles, which prevent organisations from sustaining partnerships, staff and long-term impact;
- Simplify access for small and micro cultural organisations, including lump-sum funding models and reduced co-financing requirements for organisations below a defined threshold;
- Expand the MEDIA strand to support immersive, interactive and AI-augmented cultural content, reflecting the evolution of creative practice and audience engagement;
- Create a dedicated mobility instrument for artists and cultural professionals, separate from Erasmus+, in the Agora EU that accounts for the specific working conditions of the creative sector, including project-based and freelance work patterns.

Embed CCIs and Artistic Research in the Successor to Horizon Europe

The next framework programme for research and innovation **must make arts, culture and creative practices structural, not optional or peripheral, components of its architecture.** We recommend:

- A dedicated funding stream for Art–Science–Technology collaboration, with its own budget line and evaluation criteria adapted to interdisciplinary and practice-based research;
- Mandatory inclusion of cultural and creative actors as equal partners in interdisciplinary consortia, from project design through to evaluation and dissemination;
- Recognition of artists as researchers within the programme's eligibility and evaluation criteria, including acceptance of artistic portfolios and practice-based outputs as evidence of research competence;
- Support for long-term research ecosystems rather than isolated project funding, including multi-year institutional partnerships, continuity funding mechanisms and network grants;
- Create dedicated bridging instruments that connect the successor to Horizon Europe, Creative Europe and regional innovation ecosystems, ensuring that artistic research, CCI-led innovation and art–science–technology collaborations can move across research, cultural production, regional development and societal uptake pathways rather than remaining confined to isolated programme silos.

[7] https://cdn.ymaws.com/elia-artschools.org/resource/resmgr/elia.site-ym.com/Leveraging_the_Full_Potential.pdf

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT MFF

● Reform Evaluation Frameworks

EU programme evaluation must be adapted to the **specific characteristics of CCI and artistic research outputs**. This means:

- Developing qualitative and mixed-method evaluation criteria that capture process-based value, community impact and long-term ecosystem contributions;
- Replacing or supplementing publication-count and patent metrics with indicators relevant to creative practice, including audience reach, societal uptake, policy influence and cultural diversity impact;
- Investing in shared evaluation infrastructure, common methodologies, trained evaluators and peer-review panels with CCI expertise, across Creative Europe, Horizon Europe and cohesion programmes;
- Piloting participatory evaluation models in which communities and beneficiaries contribute to assessing project impact, consistent with the participatory design principles that PACESETTERS and S+T+ARTS EC(H)O have applied in their work.

● Deploy Cohesion Funds Strategically for CCI Ecosystems

European Structural and Investment Funds offer scale that Creative Europe and Horizon Europe cannot match. We recommend that the next cohesion programming period:

- Explicitly targets CCI ecosystem development as an eligible investment priority in all regional development programmes, including in less developed and transitioning regions where cultural infrastructure is often weakest;
- Introduces tailored instruments for creative enterprises, including lighter administrative burdens, longer time horizons, equity and quasi-equity instruments, and recognition of intangible value creation;
- Funds cultural infrastructure as part of sustainable urban and rural development strategies, recognising the role of cultural spaces in social cohesion and local economic regeneration;
- Supports cross-border CCI cooperation programmes, particularly in border regions and areas with shared cultural heritage, building on existing Interreg models.

A JOINT COMMITMENT TO ADVOCACY

PACESETTERS and S+T+ARTS EC(H)O commit to contributing actively to the advocacy process in the months ahead. Specifically, we will:

- Formally endorse the #NamePlaceFund campaign and actively promote it within our networks across the EU, in particular by writing to Ministries of Finance, Ministries of Culture/Research/Science/Higher Education, and the permanent representatives of European countries;
- Contribute evidence from our project portfolios to the policy brief process initiated at the SAR 2026 Roundtable in Galway, working towards a consolidated advocacy document ahead of key MFF milestones;
- Coordinate with Culture Action Europe, ELIA, SAR and the S+T+ARTS community to ensure alignment of advocacy positions and avoid fragmentation of the cultural sector's voice in MFF negotiations;
- Engage with European Parliament intergroups on culture and on research and innovation, providing briefings and evidence for parliamentary interventions;
- Provide substantive input to European Commission consultations on the next framework programme, the Creative Europe successor instrument, and the European Competitiveness Fund design process.

We call on all partners in the European CCI and artistic research community to join this coordinated effort. The window for influence on the next MFF is open. It will not remain so indefinitely. The time to act is now.

POSITION PAPER

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