ekip White Paper

Stop putting on acts, make a difference! Time to (finally) frame policies for culture, creativity, and innovation

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About ekip

ekip is a collaborative platform designed to boost the development of innovation capacity in ecosystems to include the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI).

Creatives are not just "nice to have" they are essential for driving progress on major challenges like the green and digital transformation and social inclusion. Their competences and skills are crucial for tackling complex innovation processes involving diverse stakeholders.

Rooted in open innovation, *ekip* brings together broad stakeholder groups to co-create and deliver evidence-based policy recommendations. Together, we're shaping smarter innovation policies for ecosystems where collaborative processes and cross and open innovation are standard practice. We believe this will empower the CCIs to become drivers of innovation, creating a better and brighter future.

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Executive Summary

European Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) have become an established policy field across the EU, with most countries recognising their economic and societal contributions. Over two decades of development have strengthened visibility and legitimacy through mapping, statistics, and policy documents. However, despite growing understanding of CCI's wider societal value – such as contributions to social cohesion, education, and innovation – major barriers remain.

A core challenge is the persistence of policy silos separating cultural policy, trade and industry policy, and innovation policy. This fragmentation prevents CCI actors from fully engaging in innovation ecosystems and limits their role in driving green, digital, and socially inclusive transitions. While several countries have attempted to address this through regional initiatives or centres of expertise ("policy airlifts"), these efforts remain uneven and often lack long-term support.

ekip addresses these gaps by offering a shared European infrastructure for policy-makers, researchers, and creative actors. Through analyses, thematic studies, and toolkits, ekip facilitates transitions from data-gathering to future-oriented policy design. Its thematic focus areas demonstrate the diverse needs of the sector and highlight opportunities for more coherent, cross-sector innovation policies.

To realise CCI's full potential, governance structures must become more coordinated, data collection more systematic, and CCI more firmly embedded within mainstream innovation policy frameworks.

Recommendations:

- Break Down Policy Silos
- Strengthen Systematic CCI Data and Monitoring
- Integrate CCI into National and Regional Innovation Policies
- Support Regional and Local "Policy Airlifts"
- Use the *ekip* Platform as a European Knowledge Hub
- Promote Holistic and Future-Oriented Policy Framing

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1 Introduction

To keep up with the general CCI (Cultural and Creative Industries) policy developments in Europe and to strengthen the shared understanding of the "bigger picture", *ekip* looked into CCI policy documents of the EU, national, and subnational levels. Following the more than two decades of continuous policymaking in the EU level, CCI is today rather well established as a matter of interest and as a policy area. Studying national CCI policy documents of the twelve countries involved in *ekip*, preparing for the Policy Landscape Analysis (*ekip* Deliverable D4.2), it became clear that CCI policies have found their foothold, although the intensity of active development and support measures vary a lot from country to country.

The apparent common denominator found across countries was that the relevance of CCI for national and subnational economies is well perceived, appreciated and more or less supported. This agreement reflects as similarity in choices of word and prioritisations in policy documents. Many European CCI related policy documents have in common the vision to strengthen the CCI sector in general and to encourage actors in the sector in their creative, digitally up-to-date and technologically savvy, innovative, networked, internationally oriented, and holistically sustainable business activities that, eventually, add to the competitiveness and prosperity of the nation, the region, or the EU. For sure, since the early 2000s, the programmatic development of CCI policies in the EU, with the articulated need for coherent CCI policies, has strongly influenced national and regional policy developments.

2 From Mapping to Policy Measures

The pinning down of CCI as a sector, as fields of activity, actors and businesses, is the primary step of introducing and adjusting CCI policies to a regime. The mapping manoeuvre makes the "new" domain exist through quantification and statistics by measuring, for example, their share in employment and contribution to GDP and exports. Quantification is crucial for making the sector – and therein the concept – recognised. Mapping of CCI has been undertaken in most *ekip* countries, although results are not always (easily) comparable.

Some – but not all – countries have a dedicated public organisation to develop, study, and promote the CCI. Most active countries collect and produce data and numerical information about their CCI, which supports longitudinal monitoring of policy impacts and comparative studies. Still, such data is not systematically available, although the need for a better information and data basis about the CCI is recognised in several countries. Countries that already have adopted the practice of more or less regular monitoring of their CCI sector (e.g. Estonia, Flanders, the Netherlands, Sweden) make an opportunity for learning and exchange of methods and capacity building for other countries.

The significance of CCI in and for the society has become more valued than before. This reads as evolving perceptions as CCI's relevance is today comprehended beyond shares of GDP and export. A recent example from Estonia exemplifies this in the national CCI study results published in June 2025. The study contributes to and builds on the Estonian continuum of mapping the country's CCI sector and its development underlining the importance of CCI in society beyond its economic value:

"The importance of the creative economy is not defined solely by its contribution to GDP or employment, but also by its broader societal impact – creative fields enhance social cohesion, support education and mental well-being, and often act as a source of social innovation." (Varblane et al 2025, 13).

The problem is, however, that while the horizontal impacts of CCI benefit across policy sectors, the different policy sectors struggle to connect with each other to cooperate and support the CCI with joint action and policy measures. This political bypassing underscores the tangential position of CCI regarding

policy sectors, especially in relation to trade and industry policies on the one hand and cultural policies on the other hand. Moreover, as was found during the *ekip* policy landscape analysis, innovation policies continue to struggle to recognise the CCI at all, and this, from the *ekip* viewpoint, is a major obstacle not only for sound innovation cultures but for viable future societies.

3 How to Overcome the Dispersion of Policies for Culture and Creativity, and Innovation?

From the policy analysis point of view the case of CCI offers an example of policy diffusion. The expansive growth in policymaking for CCI has during the past quarter of a century led to a global phenomenon with the concept (interchangeably 'creative industries', 'creative economy', or, 'cultural and creative industries') travelling from Australia to the UK, to most European countries and all directions, East and South, West and North, and that has been followed by an increasing mass of development and research projects yielding numerous reports and articles (Prince 2010). The challenge remains, if and how these results are recognised, addressed and adopted in the context of policy dispersion, where matters relating to cultural and creative sectors and trades are dispersed into several administrative and political silos.

The will to advance innovation policies for the CCI and support cultural and creative actors' role in innovation ecosystems is structurally hampered by siloed policies. While administrative silos can be viewed as a follow-up of longitudinal path-dependencies of several decades, these silos have proved to be persistent against initiatives to policy reframing efforts. It sure would be oversimplified to claim this effect of path-dependence only to be negative, because established public cultural policies as well as public policies on trades and industries make well-justified parts of governance.

However, for finding new solutions and perspectives to issues that apply to large amounts of people and societies the political and administrative rigidity is likely to feed developmental inertia and tardiness even in situations where needs of changes have been well perceived for years. Instead, as needs evolve or escalate, also gaps in policy-making and respective administration tend to grow. This chain appears as political unresponsiveness even in contexts that otherwise (appear to) advocate research and evidence-based decision-making and can lead to illogical top-down calls for increased cross-sectoral cooperation at local and regional levels that anyway is made half-paralyzed by siloed administration at higher tiers.

Regarding the CCI, this phenomenon has been addressed by building different "policy airlifts" that aim to create connections across policy sectors resulting with, for example, national or regional centres of expertise dedicated to the advancement, study, and monitoring of CCI activities. Also, it seems more common at regional and local levels than at national and international levels to co-plan across policy sectors to achieve common goals. It remains to be seen, whether these inter-ministerial or cross-sectoral arrangements turn out to be temporary or pathways to new sections of policy development and implementation. The efforts to develop CCI sector and its role in innovation policies regionally and locally definitely would benefit from coordinated support from national and EU levels. This means that there is a need for a holistic approach to strengthen and support CCI and innovation policies respectively at these different levels.

4 How can *ekip* Push for Change?

The focal development step that *ekip* brings to advance the interlinkages between the CCI and innovation policies is the *ekip* platform that through its collection of studies and analyses, policy recommendations, practical toolkits and guided ways forward helps different actors active and interested in CCI and open innovation processes to proceed from data mapping to imagine feasible policy visions and future-oriented methods for practical innovation work.

The *ekip* practice of studying various topical or emerging themes that relate to CCI and innovation helps to fathom and explore the different sides and fields of culture and creativity that the scope of CCI policies cover. Focusing on themes such as 'sustainability transition in fashion and textiles' or 'cross-innovation with and within performing arts' discloses the different needs and issues that require attention and reactions from several actors: public bodies, policy-makers, developers, researchers, and other. These include, elementarily, the needs to create and sustain opportunities for viable, open innovation ecosystems and develop responsive measures that support the constructive and sustainable development for and by the CCI sector and its actors.

The *ekip* platform offers a Europe-wide "policy airlift" for the like-minded and interested to discuss and develop together future policies and support measures that allow different fields of CCI to flourish in innovation ecosystems.

5 What Next?

Perceiving the CCI policy development from the more general, EU-wide perspective, it soon appears that national, regional, and even more local public sector bodies are key players in promoting and advancing European CCI policies and measures that support the sector and its actors: their public visibility, participation in development and access to innovation and funding schemes, and their general vitality and performance, including but not restricted to business growth. However, it also seems that the value and potential of CCI is much better known among those already inside the policy community while others outside the circles might still not recognise the political existence of the topic (Prince 2010, 133– 35). In many policy documents addressing the CCI this tends to reflect as similarity in choices of word, goals, and measures to achieve those goals. Finding differences between CCI related policy documents on national or regional levels would therefore require more nuanced reading and comparative analyses.

Although the relevance of CCI for national and subnational economies is often well perceived, at least at the level of some policy documents, this reflection might also just be telling of the discursive voyage of CCI policies – of the successful global policy diffusion. Meanwhile, this success is downplayed by the ongoing policy dispersion, as responsibilities to advance CCI and innovation policies are scattered around and between different policy sectors and administrative silos. This, again, may reflect the marginal role of policies related to culture and creativity, a phenomenon that has lately been addressed and tackled by, for example, the UNESCO Mondiacult Declaration in 2022 and most recently in the Culture Compass, the new cultural political communication from the European Commission. Proponents of CCI and related innovation policies should therefore keep closer track of adjacent policy developments and the evolvements of the larger European CCI policy landscape and make them more widely known – the *ekip* platform already offers a base for this. This serves, essentially, for the ability and the need to imagine and articulate new, well-thought and feasible future policy framings for culture, creativity, and innovation.

Literature and References

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