PACESETTERS

Policy Brief

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PACESETTERS Policy Brief

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Abbreviations

ETHICS	Ethical Guidelines
GA	Grant Agreement
CA	Consortium Agreement
DMP	Data Management Plan
D,E&C	Dissemination, Exploitation & Communication
WP	Work Package
T	Task
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Horizon Europe
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
CCI	Cultural and Creative Industries
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
CCS	Creative Case Studies
RWL	Real World Laboratory
CTF	Creative Transformation Framework
OCEAN	Open Call for Emerging, Advanced, and Novel Practices
OMP	Open Map of Projects
LIA	Local Impact Academy
IP	Intellectual Property
T&C	Terms and Conditions

Consortium Partners

No* Short name	Participant organisation name	Country
1 NTNU (Coordinator)	NORGES TEKNISK-NATURVITENSKAPELIGE UNIVERSITET	NO
2 GALWAY	UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY	IE
3 JU	UNIWERSYTET JAGIELLONSKI	PL
4 ECBN	EUROPEAN CREATIVE BUSINESS NETWORK	NL
5 T6	T6 ECOSYSTEMS	IT
6 FHG	FRAUNHOFER GESELLSCHAFT ZUR FOERDERUNG DER ANGEWANDTEN FORSCHUNG	DE
7 UD'A	UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI G.D'ANNUNZIO CHIETI PESCARA	IT
8 FAMP	FEDERACIÓN ANDALUZA DE MUNICIPIOS Y PROVINCIAS	ES
9 FGPM	FUNDACIÓN GENALGUACIL PUEBLO MUSEO	ES
10 GIAF	GALWAY INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL	IE
11 OKN	OŚRODEK KULTURY IM. C. K. NORWIDA	PL
12 ASP	AKADEMIA SZTUK PIĘKNYCH IM. JANA MATEJKI W KRAKOWIE	PL
13 DYNE	STICHTING DYNE.ORG	NL
14 EIT CC	EIT CULTURE & CREATIVITY GMBH	DE
15 UCAM	UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE	UK

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Executive Summary

European competitiveness on global and regional scales hinges on key factors, including arts, culture, heritage, and creativity. The diversity of European languages, cultures and histories is its core strength, presenting unique opportunities to catalyse societal transformation and foster innovation.

However, the challenges posed by an increasingly fragmented global economy are intrinsically connected to developing new capabilities to address the environmental, economic, and social challenges arising from the climate transition. Art and culture have the potential to play a pivotal role in driving this transition, thereby making an invaluable contribution to European competitiveness.

Nevertheless, their contributions are often overlooked and underfunded, and not fully integrated into systemic transition strategies. This is reflected in the draft for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2028–2034. The proposed restructuring of the EU's long-term budget under the next MFF risks overlooking or ignoring current dynamics and emerging potential at the intersection of pioneering artistic and collaborative research. By subsuming Cluster 2 activities under the broader heading 2: Competitiveness, Prosperity & Security, the new framework appears to prioritise technology-driven innovation and geopolitical resilience over the cultural nuances of research and knowledge production.

The following recommendations emphasise the urgent need and unprecedented opportunity to maximise the contribution of arts and culture to clean, fair and competitive transitions.

- recognising artistic and practice-based research through the arts as a genuine form of knowledge production within Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs).
- strengthening the connection between arts and culture, heritage and creativity with science and technology
- connecting collaborative research with the practical and theoretical knowledge generated across the arts and creative disciplines.

To achieve this, funding for artistic research projects must be accessible under all three pillars of the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. As a strategic, cross-cutting approach it is crucial for both sections of Pillar II: Competitiveness and Society. This will foster ecosystems that encourage creative experimentation, critical reflection and innovation — values that are essential to Europe's cultural diversity and competitive advantage as a global soft power.

Therefore, this policy brief calls for measures and schemes to be defined and implemented for long-term integration into the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034).

1 Introduction

The current document contains all the information related to the submission of D4.3 Policy Brief from the conceptual ideation to its submission and further revision. During the project review meeting held in December 2025, reviewers recommended to include feedback gathered during the Creative Transformation Summit meeting, held in November 2025.

With the occasion for revising this document, it was decided, for the sake of clarity, to include in this updated version specific information on how the topics for the Policy Brief have been selected (Chapter 1), the organisation of the policy clinic in Malaga and the feedback gathered at the Summit (Chapter 6) and the final layout used to disseminate the approved text in the form of a Policy Brief (Annex 1).

In order to produce the text that was translated into a Policy Brief, T6 adopted a structured and iterative methodological approach aimed at ensuring that the Policy Brief was both analytically robust and grounded in the practical experiences of the consortium partners. The process began with a systematic mapping of the key thematic areas to be addressed in the Policy Brief, with the objective of capturing the most relevant policy-relevant insights emerging from the project activities.

In line with this approach, T6 organized and conducted a series of bilateral consultations with the main partners involved in the Real World Laboratories, as well as with all partners participating in WP4. These consultations took the form of semi-structured interviews designed to elicit partners' perspectives on critical challenges, enabling factors, and policy implications related to their respective contexts and activities. In particular, interviews were carried out with representatives from Galway, Fraunhofer, Nova Huta, FAMP, Genalguacil, the University of Chieti-Pescara, ECBN, and NTNU.

Building on the insights gathered through these exchanges, T6 developed a comprehensive thematic map highlighting the most salient, recurrent, and sensitive topics emerging from the partners' contributions. This thematic mapping exercise was subsequently validated through a cross-checking process against the Map of Challenges previously developed by the consortium, as well as through a comparative analysis with the issues discussed during consortium meetings. This triangulation ensured coherence across project outputs and reinforced the internal consistency of the analytical framework underpinning the Policy Brief.

Through this iterative analytical process, T6 identified and prioritised the most relevant topics to be included in the Policy Brief. These topics were then further elaborated, refined, and consolidated through successive rounds of internal review, leading to the final structure and content of the deliverable. In particular, the development of the Policy Brief was informed by a careful consideration of policy issues operating at different governance levels, reflecting the diversity of contexts represented within the consortium. Feedback collected from partners highlighted how challenges, priorities, and policy needs vary significantly across local, national, and European settings, depending on institutional frameworks, cultural ecosystems, and territorial specificities. T6 systematically accounted for these differences by analysing partner contributions through a multilevel lens, ensuring that locally grounded insights from the Real World Laboratories were contextualised within broader national policy frameworks and aligned, where relevant, with ongoing European policy debates.

This approach allowed the Policy Brief to balance context-specific evidence with cross-cutting policy considerations, capturing both shared challenges and differentiated perspectives. As a

result, the final document articulates policy messages that are sensitive to territorial diversity while remaining coherent and actionable at the European level.

In preparation for the Creative Transformation Summit held in Málaga, the Policy Brief was translated into Spanish and partially reworked to ensure alignment with the local institutional, cultural, and policy context. This adapted version served as a core working document for the policy labs, which were organised using a world café methodology. The availability of a Spanish version was essential to enable local policymakers to engage directly with the Policy Brief, supporting structured, theme-focused discussions at the tables and fostering informed, participatory exchange grounded in both the Policy Brief's recommendations and the local policy context

2 Strengthening collaborative research with and through the arts

To effectively tackle today's complex challenges, we must harness the collective intelligence that emerges from open-ended, collaborative research. This approach goes beyond individual excellence, requiring innovative cooperation between various stakeholders, sectors and disciplines. It involves integrating human and machine efforts, as well as engaging a wide range of stakeholders. Collaborative research with and through the arts can play a significant role in driving green, digital and social transitions. By fostering creative confidence, artistic research enables the creation of change and the ability to adapt to it. It harnesses the power to affect and be affected, which is essential for societal transformation.

The need: Collaborating across sectors and disciplines often requires us to overcome deeply ingrained personal and professional habits and norms. Therefore, enhancing our capacity for conducting collaborative research with and through the arts is essential. This involves considering the cultural dimensions of societal transformation and the emotions it evokes.

- Enhance and expand the capabilities for conducting collaborative research with and through the arts, both within and beyond academic settings.
- Provide opportunities for skill development and financial support to encourage artists and creative professionals to engage in research and innovation initiatives.
- Revise and improve the existing evaluation criteria for assessing excellence, quality, and impact in research and innovation activities. These enhancements should aim to better recognise and capture the innovative potential of transdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches.

3 Scaling Artistic Research and Innovation for climate transition

Across Europe, artists and creators are experimenting with regenerative, bio-based materials and developing alternatives to petrochemicals by using locally sourced, renewable resources. However, these initiatives are often fragmented and small-scale, and disconnected from wider policy or industrial frameworks. The challenge lies in moving beyond micro-level experimentation and scaling up systemically by establishing structures that facilitate horizontal knowledge sharing and non-linear innovation.

The need: A transition from project-based funding to sustainable, long-term investment strategies, supported by knowledge hubs and pre-accelerator and incubator formats specifically designed to build collaborative R&I capacities within the CCI. This is in response to the challenges posed by the climate transition. Rather than using pre-existing blueprints from technology-driven innovation in engineering fields, this approach should be adopted.

These recommendations are in line with the strategic priorities of the upcoming Horizon Europe Work Programme for 2026–2027. They aim to lay the groundwork for long-term support mechanisms under the MFF for 2028–2034. The goal is to empower creative ecosystems to adapt to, contribute to, and drive Europe's green and digital transitions. The recommendations should be implemented through dedicated Innovation Actions (IAs), Research and Innovation Actions (RIAs), and Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs).

3.1 Strengthening European competitiveness by leveraging the innovation potential in arts-based research and research-based arts with independent digital infrastructures

- Support the development of independent digital infrastructures that empower the cultural and creative sectors and industries to regain control over their data and metadata, and provide them with the means to redirect value creation back to the

sector in ways that benefit artists and creators. This will strengthen their capacity to respond to the challenges of the climate transition.

3.2 Establish Triple Transition Hubs for Artists and Creatives

- Establish 'Birds of a Feather' groups where artists and creators from across Europe can connect and collaborate based on their affinities, capacities, preferences, and shared interests.
- Fund long-term, advanced innovation projects led by artists and creatives, ensuring their viability and sustainability.
- Prioritise methods that emphasise process innovation and peer-to-peer learning over product commercialisation alone.
- Develop mechanisms through public funding to support high-risk investment in the cultural and creative sectors, thereby driving sustainable development and the climate transition in rural and remote areas.
- Support cross-sectoral innovation approaches that prioritise cooperative or open-source business models operating within and beyond the CCIs rather than relying on proprietary models that create creative silos.

4 Recontextualising Innovation through collective, place-based practice

Innovation should be understood as both a technological and a cultural, community-based and ecological process. To regenerate both ecosystems and social structures, heritage knowledge, digital tools, and local materials must be integrated. Conventional entrepreneurial models, which focus on individualism and market readiness, must evolve to prioritise co-agency, collective stewardship and distributed capacity building.

The need: Support the development and testing of new governance and collective ownership models as a creative resilience strategy.

The proposed actions support the anticipated key directions in the Horizon Europe Work Programme (WP) 2026–2027 and are designed to be scalable and structurally integrated within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, particularly through cohesion and territorial development instruments.

4.1 Launch programmes to support and foster arts-based innovation and new governance models for local transitions

- Fund transdisciplinary laboratories that bring together artists, researchers, craftspeople, technologists and local communities.
- Support projects that combine traditional skills, such as natural dyeing and fermentation, with digital technologies.
- Offer small-scale production grants based on community utility rather than market viability alone.

4.2 Integrate Cultural Innovation into Just Transition Mechanisms

- Make artists and cultural actors eligible partners in Just Transition Fund initiatives.
- Strengthen and leverage the innovative potential of novel artistic research approaches within the New European Bauhaus programme by focusing on reimagining disused sites as regenerative innovation hubs (e.g. community-run biomaterials laboratories).

4.3 Reform EU Innovation Metrics

- Broaden KPIs to include social cohesion, collective agency and ecological restoration.
- Incentivise projects that promote cultural 'unlearning' (e.g. moving away from extractive design models).
- Propose alternative value systems and explore nuanced ways of assessing the impact of innovative projects, capturing and showcasing their essence and contribution to regenerative futures.

5 Leveraging arts-based innovation for decentralised governance models

Top-down governance structures often overlook local knowledge, creativity and the complex social dynamics of communities. Shifting towards distributed governance models that are location-specific, experience-based, and participatory can enhance responsiveness, equity, and innovation. Artists can facilitate these new forms of governance by using participatory tools, anticipatory methods, storytelling and community engagement strategies to translate abstract policies into local actions. PACESETTERS uses Real World Laboratories to test and evaluate policy initiatives in the context of the climate transition at three distinct scales: rural communities, small towns, and post-industrial settlements.

The need: emphasising collective agency in order to rethink conventional approaches to governance in the context of the climate transition.

These measures contribute to the participatory innovation and inclusive governance objectives of Horizon Europe, which require sustained support under democratic innovation and territorial cooperation schemes in the MFF 2028–2034.

5.1 Establish Local Arts and Culture Policy Labs

- Support municipal-level labs where artists collaborate with local governments to co-design regenerative strategies, such as waste repurposing and land regeneration
- Support arts-based innovation and the prototyping of new, alternative decision-making processes that enhance the representation of underserved communities and people at risk of exclusion.

5.2 Fund Trans-local Cultural Cooperatives

- Introduce within AgoraEU a funding stream for cultural cooperatives experimenting with shared governance, such as distributed design studios and shared regenerative infrastructure
- Encourage inter-regional collaboration that builds on local strengths while contributing to pan-European innovation goals.

5.3 Establish a regular, reoccurring format of a “Creative Transformation Forum”

- Convene structured, recurring forums that bring together EU policymakers, artists, cultural organisations, and ecological innovators
- Develop modular toolkits to support citizen participation, including multilingual communication materials and digital engagement tools
- Use these forums to identify policy gaps, pilot solutions, and track the long-term impact of cross-creative innovation on the green transition.

6 The Creative Transformation Summit: findings and feedback on the policy brief

6.1 The organisation of the policy clinic

The policy clinic "The role of artistic research in the climate transition" took place on 12 November 2025**,** from 15:00 to 18:00, during the Pacesetters Summit "A polyclinic of creative practice". The design and organisation of the clinic were developed by T6 collaboratively with the PACESETTERS project coordinators and informed by preparatory discussions with stakeholders involved in the project's Real-World Laboratories (RWL)**.** This preparatory phase was essential to ensure that the clinic responded to concrete, practice-based challenges and policy needs emerging from ongoing experimentation at local and regional level. Particular attention was paid to the context of the Summit, including the expected presence of local and regional stakeholders, policy actors, and practitioners from Spain, alongside European-level participants. As a result, the clinic was intentionally structured to combine European policy debate with local and place-based perspectives, reflecting one of the core insights emerging from the RWLs: the central role of local contexts as innovation laboratories for the green transition.

The primary objective of the policy clinic was to critically discuss and validate the first PACESETTERS Policy Brief, focusing on the role of artistic and practice-based research in supporting the climate transition. Building on the project's understanding of collaborative research with and through the arts, the clinic aimed to:

- Foster structured dialogue between researchers, artists, policymakers, and local governance actors**.**
- Test the relevance of the Policy Brief's key challenges and recommendations against real-world policy and practice**.**
- Collect targeted feedback to inform the development of a second Policy Brief (that will be submitted at M36)**.**

The conceptual framing of the event drew on the PACESETTERS understanding of artistic research as a form of collaborative, open-ended knowledge production, on par with scientific and technological approaches and substantially contributing to green, digital, and social transitions through creative confidence, adaptability, and affective engagement.

The policy clinic followed a three-part structure, combining official remarks by representatives from the European Commission with plenary discussion and participatory policy labs. The clinic opened with introductions by Patricio Ortiz de la Torre, head of sector in the Inclusive Society Unit, focusing on Cultural Heritage within Horizon Europe's Cluster 2 and Giuliana De Francesco, policy officer at the European Commission's DG RTD, focusing on innovative research in the cultural and creative sectors. The clinic continued with a panel discussion, moderated by Stella Diakou from T6 Ecosystems, designed to frame the key policy questions rather than deliver formal presentations. Panellists were Florian Schneider (NTNU / University of Galway, PACESETTERS Coordinator), Professor Annela Anger-Kraavi (University of Cambridge), Teresa Muela (Directorate of the Department of Programming, Equality Policies and Networks, former General Secretary of FAMP), and Johan Haarberg (Society for Artistic Research). The panel introduced the main themes of the Policy Brief, including the recognition of artistic research within EU research frameworks, scaling artistic innovation for the climate transition, the role of local governments as innovation ecosystems, and institutional challenges such as the positioning of artistic research within the Frascati Manual and the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

The core of the clinic consisted of participatory Policy Lab sessions, organised using a world café methodology.

The choice of a policy lab format based on a world café methodology was motivated by the need to facilitate structured yet inclusive dialogue among a heterogeneous group of participants, including policymakers, artists, researchers, and local stakeholders, within a limited timeframe. This methodology was considered particularly suitable for policy validation purposes, as it enables parallel, theme-focused discussions, cross-fertilisation of perspectives, and the rapid identification of convergences and divergences across governance levels and territorial contexts. At the same time, the consortium acknowledges certain methodological limitations inherent to this approach. Time constraints necessarily limited the depth with which some complex issues could be explored, while language differences and the coexistence of multilingual tables required careful facilitation to ensure balanced participation. These constraints were mitigated through targeted facilitation, the provision of translated materials, and the use of focused discussion prompts grounded in the Policy Brief. Despite these limitations, the world café methodology proved effective for the clinic's primary objective of validating policy assumptions and collecting practice-based feedback to inform subsequent policy development.

To be effective, three discussion tables were set up, with group discussions targeting different themes. This format enabled in-depth exchange while allowing participants to engage with multiple thematic perspectives. The tables were organised around the key challenges identified in the Policy Brief, as well as the local Spanish policy context:

- **Table 1:** Scaling artistic research and innovation for the climate transition / Recontextualising innovation through collective, place-based practice / Leveraging arts-based innovation for decentralised governance models (English-language session, in person, facilitated by Stella Diakou and Annela Anger-Kraavi)
- **Table 2:** National and regional policy challenges (Spanish-language session, in person, supported by a Spanish translation of the Policy Brief, facilitated by Teresa Muela)
- **Table 3:** the Policy Brief and its broader policy implications (online, English-language session, facilitated by Marta Materska-Samek)

The policy clinic was successfully attended by participants to the summit. The first panel drew around 40 participants, while the 3 round tables were attended by 25 participants who actively contributed to the discussion. Overall, the organisation of the policy clinic deliberately prioritised dialogue, co-creation, and policy relevance, rather than one-way dissemination. The emphasis on local-level discussion, particularly through the Spanish-language table and the choice of Málaga as host city, reflected the project's commitment to grounding European policy debates in territorial realities. The clinic thus functioned not only as a consultation on the Policy Brief, but also as a testing ground for collaborative policy-making approaches, aligned with the PACESETTERS methodology and the lessons emerging from its Real-World Laboratories.

6.2 The feedback collected

6.2.1 Table 1

The discussion at Table 1 focused on the three main recommendations set forth by the policy brief, namely how artistic research and arts-based innovation can meaningfully contribute to the climate transition, with particular attention to the concept of "scaling," the role of place-based practice, and the implications for governance and democracy. Participants challenged

narrow or technocratic understandings of innovation and scaling, proposing alternative, ecosystem-oriented perspectives rooted in diversity, resilience, and local contexts.

Participants emphasised that scaling artistic research should not be understood as simple quantitative growth or replication of a single dominant model. Instead, scaling was framed as the parallel growth of multiple, diverse initiatives, described metaphorically as "many gardens rather than one big plant." In this view, scaling refers to meaningful impact, long-term societal change, and the articulation of alternative visions for future societies, rather than an increase in outputs or audience numbers alone. A recurring concern was the fragmentation and short-termism of artistic projects, many of which remain time-limited and disappear once funding ends, leaving limited traceability, visibility, or cumulative learning. Addressing this structural fragility was seen as a prerequisite for any serious discussion of scaling. Scaling was also understood as a process of continuous communication and visibility, beginning early in the life of initiatives rather than only after final results are produced. Participants highlighted the need to systematically map existing artistic research initiatives and "gardens" across Europe, capturing their diversity and contextual specificity rather than selectively promoting a small number of "best practices." The discussion also stressed the value of local knowledge and everyday artistic researchers already embedded in communities, whose work often remains invisible to policy frameworks despite its relevance for local climate action and social transformation.

Another line of discussion focused on the conditions that allow artistic initiatives to survive and thrive over time. Drawing on a permaculture metaphor, participants explored what kinds of institutional, social, and cultural "soil" enable resilience even in the absence of continuous or heavy funding. Understanding why certain projects fade away was seen not as a failure narrative, but as a source of learning for designing more sustainable support mechanisms. While participants acknowledged that simpler, more standardised models may scale faster in the short term, they argued that complex and diverse cultural ecologies are more resilient and better suited to addressing long-term systemic challenges such as the climate transition.

Focusing on the climate transition, the discussion highlighted that this should be understood as shorthand for a broader planetary and societal crisis, encompassing social, economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions. In this context, artistic research was seen as particularly valuable in helping individuals and communities move beyond feelings of inevitability or paralysis, described as being "stuck on a path to the cliff", towards imagining alternative futures. However, participants also underlined the need to demonstrate concrete links between artistic research and climate-related change, including impacts on behaviour, governance practices, and social systems. Abstract claims about the value of the arts were considered insufficient without tangible examples and documented effects.

A central challenge identified was how to convincingly articulate the added value of artistic research to policymakers accustomed to engineering, economic, or purely technical solutions. Participants agreed that artistic research should be positioned as complementary to these approaches, not as a replacement. To strengthen this case, the group highlighted the importance of evidence, narratives, and appropriate forms of measurement capable of capturing social, cultural, and systemic impacts. In this respect, PACESETTERS was widely perceived as a crucial vehicle for identifying, documenting, and communicating concrete examples of how artistic research contributes to climate-related transitions across diverse European contexts.

6.2.2 Table 2

The discussion at Table 2 focused on national and regional policy challenges affecting rural areas, with particular attention to the policy recommendation calling for stronger recognition of artistic research within the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Conducted in Spanish

and grounded in rural experience, the roundtable highlighted both the structural barriers limiting the impact of EU-level cultural and research policies in rural territories and the significant, yet often under-recognised, innovation potential of these contexts.

Participants identified a gap between European policy frameworks and their intelligibility at local level. EU policy documents and artistic research initiatives are often perceived as abstract, distant, or difficult to relate to everyday rural priorities. Rural residents frequently question how such strategies connect to their lived realities, livelihoods, and local challenges. This disconnect was framed not as a lack of interest, but as a failure of translation. Participants stressed the need for mediation mechanisms capable of transforming complex policy language into accessible narratives and actionable guidance that rural communities can meaningfully engage with. Contrary to stereotypes of resistance or conservatism, rural communities were described as exhibiting a pragmatic openness to experimentation, often expressed through an attitude of "let's see what happens." This mindset was interpreted as fertile ground for artistic research, provided that engagement processes respect local rhythms, social relations, and expectations. Participants argued that rural contexts can function as informal laboratories for innovation, but only when initiatives are perceived as relevant, understandable, and embedded rather than externally imposed. While there was broad consensus on the need for transformation in rural areas, participants raised critical questions about the foundations and objectives of that change. Policymakers were encouraged to articulate clearer theories of change explaining why artistic research matters, how it contributes to rural development, and what types of outcomes are considered meaningful. Without this conceptual grounding, artistic research risks being perceived as decorative, instrumental, or disconnected from structural challenges faced by rural communities.

In parallel, a strong demand emerged for clear, non-technical communication explaining what artistic research is, why it is undertaken, and what value it brings. Participants emphasised that without this foundational understanding, participation remains superficial and community ownership of projects is weakened. This issue was closely linked to accessibility: rural cultural actors, craftspeople, and informal innovators often lack the capacity to navigate complex policy documents, despite possessing significant creative and cultural capital. Participants underlined that rural communities operate according to distinct temporalities, work patterns, and social structures. Methodologies designed for urban or institutional settings frequently fail to resonate in these contexts. Rural territories were described as "unorganised hotbeds of potential," rich in informal knowledge, skills, and creative practices, but lacking structured support. Artistic research methodologies therefore need to be flexible, adaptive, and sensitive to local ways of working if they are to generate lasting impact.

The roundtable highlighted the importance of tangible, real-world projects as catalysts for meaningful outcomes. Participants agreed that artistic research in rural areas is most effective when grounded in concrete engagement rather than theoretical or abstract models. Practical projects were seen as essential for building trust, demonstrating relevance, and enabling emergent outcomes beyond predefined objectives. Support structures were considered most effective when they accompany rather than direct communities. Non-directive facilitation models that empower local actors to shape project trajectories were strongly favoured over top-down approaches. This was seen as critical for fostering genuine ownership, long-term engagement, and locally driven innovation.

Intergenerational exchange was also identified as a strategic asset for rural development. Participants stressed that rural knowledge ecosystems depend on the transmission of skills, know-how, and cultural practices across generations, an area where artistic research can play a catalytic role. Beyond social innovation, the discussion also highlighted the need for public-sector innovation. Rural development requires institutional mechanisms, governance models,

and funding structures that are better adapted to the realities of small municipalities and community-led cultural practices.

Finally, PACESETTERS was cited as a concrete example of how artistic research can align with rural development objectives. Participants noted its contribution to enhancing the visibility of local practices, enabling communities to recognise and articulate the value of their own cultural assets, and fostering critical reflection on traditions. The case of Genalguacil was highlighted as an example of a rural artistic model that, after sustained engagement, has reached a level of maturity enabling transferability to other small municipalities.

6.2.3 Table 3

The online discussion at Table 3 focused on the broader policy implications of artistic research, particularly in relation to collaboration, cross-programme relevance, and evaluation criteria. Participants stressed that artistic research should be understood as a collaborative practice rather than an individual one. Documentation, testimony, and the inclusion of multiple perspectives were identified as essential for strengthening the exploitation of artistic research experiments, making the involvement of scientists and other stakeholders particularly important.

Participants emphasised that artistic research is neither only "artistic" nor only "research," but also contributes to education and citizenship building. In this respect, its relevance extends beyond research programmes to frameworks such as Erasmus+ and CERV, suggesting the need to explore multiple policy and funding contexts in which artistic research can contribute. While artistic research was described as a powerful tool for addressing current societal challenges, participants noted that it remains poorly understood by policymakers, partly due to the individualised ways in which artists often present their work.

For policymakers and grant designers, participants highlighted the importance of focusing on processes rather than products, placing emphasis on theories of change. Qualitative approaches were considered more appropriate than purely quantitative indicators or KPIs for capturing the value generated through artistic research.

6.3 How the feedback will inform the next steps

Beyond its function as a consultation exercise, the policy clinic generated a number of immediate, process-level outcomes. In the short term, the discussions contributed to a clearer articulation of points of convergence and divergence among participants regarding the role of artistic research in the climate transition, particularly in relation to scaling, governance, and territorial relevance. The clinic also facilitated a shared understanding between European-level policy perspectives and local and regional viewpoints, making visible both areas of alignment and constructive disagreement.

While longer-term policy influence will be assessed through subsequent project activities and the development of the second Policy Brief, these short-term outcomes constitute interim indicators of impact. They include the validation and refinement of key policy assumptions, the identification of gaps in policy translation at local level, and the prioritisation of issues requiring further analytical and empirical work. As such, the clinic functioned not only as a preparatory step, but as an active mechanism for shaping the project's ongoing policy-oriented research and engagement strategy.

At this stage, the synthesis presented in Section 6.2 constitutes a preliminary analysis. Further analytical work will be undertaken to refine, consolidate, and translate the feedback into policy-

relevant arguments and recommendations that will be integrated into the development of the second PACESETTERS Policy Brief.

Methodologically, feedback from the three tables will be analysed in a complementary manner, reflecting their distinct but interrelated perspectives. For example, insights from Table 1 will inform a refinement of the conceptual framework, particularly with regard to scaling, impact pathways, and ecosystem-based approaches to artistic research. Table 2 will inform a territorial and governance-oriented analysis, with a specific focus on policy translation, rural contexts, and implications for the next Multiannual Financial Framework. Feedback from Table 3 will support a methodological review of evaluation approaches and the positioning of artistic research across multiple EU policy and funding programmes. The second Policy Brief will integrate these strands through a cross-analysis that tests the relevance of the initial policy assumptions against practice-based feedback; refines theories of change underpinning the role of artistic research in societal transitions and identifies implications for policy design, funding instruments, and evaluation frameworks.

Overall, the feedback collected through the policy clinic confirmed the relevance of the first Policy Brief while clearly indicating areas requiring refinement, clarification, and stronger empirical grounding. The second Policy Brief will therefore build on this preliminary analysis by systematically integrating feedback from all three tables. This iterative process will ensure that the second Policy Brief is grounded in stakeholder experience, reflects territorial diversity and regional needs, and moves from exploratory discussion towards more robust, actionable policy guidance.

7 Conclusions

This document's primary objective is to establish a framework that recognizes artists and creators as pivotal innovators, catalysts and strategic enablers of Europe’s regenerative future, not just as entertainers, illustrators or decorators.

This involves acknowledging the triple transformative potential of the CCIs. Indeed, the CCIs — powered by artists, creative entrepreneurs and cultural practitioners — do more than just pursue beauty and style or make environments more aesthetically pleasing. They also raise awareness and foster a deeper understanding of complex issues, shifting mindsets and influencing behaviours. The arts and culture has the capacity to inspire, communicate values and reimagine collective futures, thereby positioning artists and creators as key agents of societal transformation.

Accordingly, the cultural and creative sectors must be at the heart of policy thinking and decision-making. This means empowering artists, creatives and cultural practitioners as partners in governance, infrastructure development and systemic change, not just as innovators.

The proposed policies support a paradigm shift from linear innovation to distributed intelligence, from individual entrepreneurship to collective capacity, and from extractive models to regenerative futures. The time is right to unlock the full potential of Europe’s creative ecosystems.

These measures should support the development of independent digital infrastructures that empower the cultural and creative sectors to regain control over their data and metadata. It is crucial to redirect value creation back to the sector and creators while strengthening capacities to respond to the challenges of our time.

As the EU prepares its next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), it is essential that Pillar II of Horizon Europe preserves and reinforces a dedicated space for artistic and cultural innovation. Cluster 2: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive society has played a vital role in

establishing cultural research and practice as integral components of Europe's social and intellectual development. There is a critical window of opportunity to ensure that Horizon Europe continues to reflect the richness of Europe's cultural and creative sectors by explicitly incorporating them into research and innovation strategies. Taking these measures now will guarantee that cultural practitioners are recognised as key agents in shaping Europe's regenerative future, rather than merely peripheral beneficiaries. Their contributions must be structurally and financially supported not only across Horizon Europe, but also within cohesion and transition policies. This requires frameworks that recognise culture as a primary driver of development rather than a by-product.

8 Annex 1

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A call to Action for the Next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Strenthening the Role of Artistic Research

- **Scaling Artistic Research and Innovation for climate transition**
- **Innovation through collective, place-based practice**
- **Leveraging arts-based innovation for decentralised governance models**

Policy Brief, August 2025

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Scene Setting

European competitiveness on global and regional scales hinges on key factors, including arts, culture, heritage, and creativity. The diversity of European languages, cultures and histories is its core strength, presenting unique opportunities to catalyse societal transformation and foster innovation. However, the challenges posed by an increasingly fragmented global economy are intrinsically connected to developing new capabilities to address the environmental, economic, and social challenges arising from the climate transition. **Art and culture have the potential to play a pivotal role in driving this transition, thereby making an invaluable contribution to European competitiveness**.

Nevertheless, their contributions are often overlooked and underfunded, and not fully integrated into systemic transition strategies. This is reflected in the draft for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2028–2034. The proposed restructuring of the EU's long-term budget under the next MFF risks overlooking or ignoring current dynamics and emerging potential at the intersection of pioneering artistic and collaborative research. By subsuming Cluster 2 activities under the broader heading 2: Competitiveness, Prosperity & Security, the new framework appears to **prioritise technology-driven innovation and geopolitical resilience over the cultural nuances of research and knowledge production**.

To effectively tackle today's complex challenges, PACESETTERS affirms the need to exploit the collective intelligence that emerges from open-ended, collaborative research. By fostering creative confidence, artistic research enables the creation of change and the ability to adapt to it. It harnesses the power to affect and be affected, which is essential for societal transformation.

This policy brief calls for measures and schemes to be defined and implemented for long-term integration into the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034).
This document's primary objective is to establish a framework that recognizes artists and creators as pivotal innovators, catalysts and strategic enablers of Europe’s regenerative future, not just as entertainers, illustrators or decorators.

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Scaling Artistic Research and Innovation for Climate Transition

Across Europe, artists and creators are experimenting with regenerative, bio-based materials and developing alternatives to petrochemicals by using locally sourced, renewable resources. However, these initiatives are often fragmented and small-scale, and disconnected from wider policy or industrial frameworks. The challenge lies in moving beyond micro-level experimentation and scaling up systemically by establishing structures that facilitate horizontal knowledge sharing and non-linear innovation.

To do that PACESETTERS suggests to:

Strengthening European competitiveness by leveraging the innovation potential in arts-based research and research-based arts with independent digital infrastructures

- **Support the development of independent digital infrastructures** that empower the cultural and creative sectors and industries to regain control over their data and metadata, and provide them with the means to redirect value creation back to the sector in ways that benefit artists and creators. This will strengthen their capacity to respond to the challenges of the climate transition.

Establish Triple Transition Hubs for Artists and Creatives

- **Establish 'Birds of a Feather' groups** where artists and creators from across Europe can connect and collaborate based on their affinities, capacities, preferences, and shared interests.
- **Fund long-term, advanced innovation projects** led by artists and creatives, ensuring their viability and sustainability.
- **Prioritise methods that emphasise process innovation and peer-to-peer learning** over product commercialisation alone.
- **Develop mechanisms through public funding** to support high-risk investment in the cultural and creative sectors, thereby driving sustainable development and the climate transition in rural and remote areas.
- **Support cross-sectoral innovation approaches** that prioritise cooperative or open-source business models operating within and beyond the CCIs rather than relying on proprietary models that create creative silos.

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Innovation through Collective, Place-based Practice

Innovation should be understood as both a technological and a cultural, community-based and ecological process. To regenerate both ecosystems and social structures, heritage knowledge, digital tools, and local materials must be integrated. Conventional entrepreneurial models, which focus on individualism and market readiness, must evolve to prioritise co-agency, collective stewardship and distributed capacity building. There is the need to support the development and testing of new governance and collective ownership models as a creative resilience strategy.

To do that PACESETTERS suggests to:

Launch programmes to support and foster arts-based innovation and new governance models for local transitions

- **Fund transdisciplinary laboratories** that bring together artists, researchers, craftspeople, technologists and local communities.
- **Support projects that combine traditional skills**, such as natural dyeing and fermentation, with digital technologies.
- **Offer small-scale production grants** based on community utility rather than market viability alone.

Integrate Cultural Innovation into Just Transition Mechanisms

- **Make artists and cultural actors eligible partners** in Just Transition Fund initiatives.
- **Strengthen and leverage the innovative potential of novel artistic research approaches** within the New European Bauhaus programme by focusing on reimagining disused sites as regenerative innovation hubs (e.g. community-run biomaterials laboratories).

Reform EU Innovation Metrics

- **Broaden Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** to include social cohesion, collective agency and ecological restoration.
- **Incentivise projects that promote cultural 'unlearning'** (e.g. moving away from extractive design models).
- **Propose alternative value systems** and explore nuanced ways of assessing the impact of innovative projects, capturing and showcasing their essence and contribution to regenerative futures.

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Leveraging Arts-based Innovation for Decentralised Governance Models

Top-down governance structures often overlook local knowledge, creativity and the complex social dynamics of communities. Shifting towards distributed governance models that are location-specific, experience-based, and participatory can enhance responsiveness, equity, and innovation. Artists can facilitate these new forms of governance by using participatory tools, anticipatory methods, storytelling and community engagement strategies to translate abstract policies into local actions. PACESETTERS uses Real World Laboratories to test and evaluate policy initiatives in the context of the climate transition at three distinct scales: rural communities, small towns, and post-industrial settlements. It is crucial to emphasising collective agency in order to rethink conventional approaches to governance in the context of the climate transition.

To do that PACESETTERS suggests to:

Establish Local Arts and Culture Policy Labs

- **Support municipal-level labs** where artists collaborate with local governments to co-design regenerative strategies, such as waste repurposing and land regeneration.
- **Support arts-based innovation and the prototyping of new, alternative decision-making processes** that enhance the representation of underserved communities and people at risk of exclusion.

Fund Trans-local Cultural Cooperatives

- **Introduce within AgoraEU a funding stream for cultural cooperatives experimenting** with shared governance, such as distributed design studios and shared regenerative infrastructure.
- **Encourage inter-regional collaboration** that builds on local strengths while contributing to pan-European innovation goals.

Establish a regular, reoccurring format of a “Creative Transformation Forum”

- **Convene structured, recurring forums** that bring together EU policymakers, artists, cultural organisations, and ecological innovators.
- **Develop modular toolkits** to support citizen participation, including multilingual communication materials and digital engagement tools.
- **Use these forums to identify policy gaps, pilot solutions, and track the long-term impact** of cross-creative innovation on the green transition.

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PACESETTERS is a research project that brings together 15 partners to undertake collaborative, artistic and practice-based research to deepen and update the understanding of the role that Creative Industries can place in fostering a just climate transition. Through a series of co-researched creative case studies, it will test innovative ideas to set the pace of the transition. Recognising that innovation tends to happen where it's least expected, PACESETTERS will explore different ways of articulating and mobilising the multiple benefits of artistic and creative entrepreneurship at the micro level, in ways that are responsive to the challenges of European society.

PACESETTER

https://pacesetters.eu/

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